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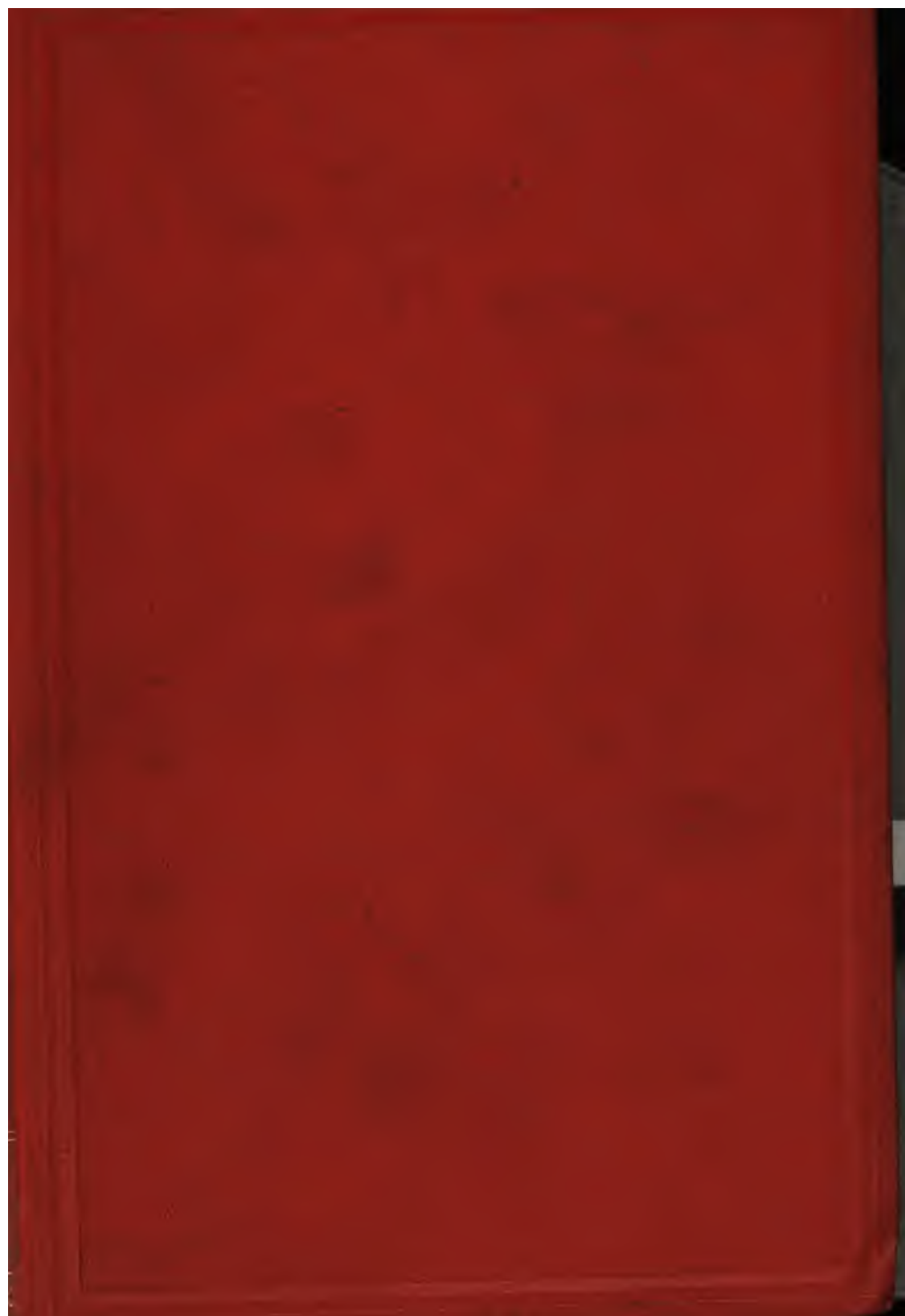
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COLONEL FORTESCUE'S DAUGHTER.

VOL. I.

COLONEL FORTESCUE'S DAUGHTER

BY

LADY CHARLES THYNNE,

AUTHOR OF

"OFF THE LINE,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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COLONEL FORTESCUE'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

Pass thou on ! for the vow is said
That may ne'er be broken ;
The trembling hand hath a blessing laid
On snowy forehead and auburn braid,
And the word is spoken
By lips that never their word betrayed.

Pass thou on ! for thy human all
Is richly given.
And the voice that claims its holy thrall
Must be sweeter for life than music's fall,
And this side heaven,
Thy lip may never that trust recall.

N. P. WILLIS.

IT was the height of the London season,
when the traffic of the streets was continually impeded by the dense crowds which thronged them ; when heat, and dust, and

2 COLONEL FORTESCUE'S DAUGHTER.

glare, and noise were the pervading elements of life ; that there was even more stir than usual in one of the smaller streets that connect Park Lane with the still greater thoroughfares. Rows of carriages, three deep ; coachmen with nosegays and favours ; the doorstep of the largest house in the street covered with red cloth, and above all the travelling carriage with the never-failing four grey posters, all gave token of a wedding ; and indeed it was well known to the fashionable world that on that day, the 18th of May, 18—, the beautiful Georgina Lennox and the gallant and handsome Horace Fortescue, late of the 4th Lancers, had on that morning plighted their troth.

The customary crowd of idle boys and decently dressed people loitered round the door. They would not go away satisfied till they had seen the bride and bridegroom leave the house to be whirled away on the

road to Dover, for it was before the time that railroads had, by intersecting the face of the country, made travelling far less enjoyable, if more convenient.

"You must come down now, darling," said Lady Lennox to her daughter, as she disengaged herself from her clinging embrace, "you must not keep your husband waiting."

"Your husband!" those words always sound so strangely to a young wife, and did especially to Georgina Lennox, who had never been a day from under her mother's roof, and whose passionate love for her was the combined feeling of daughter, sister, and friend; for she was an only child, and the love that had been always lavished upon her was unshared.

"I am ready, but you will come down with me, mamma?" she replied with a pale face and quivering lip.

Colonel Fortescue was already in the hall waiting for her. His bride took his arm and let him put her into the carriage without trusting herself to look back. As the carriage moved on she leant forward to obtain the last glimpse of her mother, and then sank back, hiding her face in her handkerchief crying bitterly. But her grief only lasted a few minutes. Looking up she saw her husband's eyes fixed upon her with grave concern, and felt at once that her emotion was selfish, and hardly as it should be. She hastily wiped her eyes and turned to him with a smile, saying,

"Please forgive me, Horace, I never left mamma before."

"I have nothing to forgive, dearest," he replied, gently drawing her towards him. "I only hope that there may be sufficient happiness in store for you to make up for all you have left."

Colonel and Mrs. Fortescue were to spend the honeymoon in Switzerland. The new scenes and the very different life made it a time of enchantment to the young wife, and neither could bear the idea of returning to England. From Switzerland they went on to the German Tyrol, and lingered among its beautiful scenery; from thence to the banks of the Rhine, visiting many quaint old towns which, in their own way, possessed an equal charm.

They could not bear to give up their wanderings to settle down as commonplace matter-of-fact householders; but sooner or later it must be done, and at last Lady Lennox's heart was gladdened by a letter from her child from Paris, to say that she and her husband were on their way home, and begging her to see that their house was in tolerable order for their reception.

The house which was to receive the newly-

married couple was a pretty, cheerful villa at Hampstead. It was not exactly the house that Colonel Fortescue would have chosen, but "Georgy" was so anxious to be near her mother, who spent a great part of the year in London, and, as in that respect it had its advantages, he made no difficulty in complying with her wishes, and took Parkhurst Lodge on a long lease. As sundry alterations were deemed necessary, it had been placed in the hands of builders and upholsterers while they were abroad, but the decorations and ornamental furniture were left for them to decide upon after their return. It would be "so amusing," they thought, "to drive into London every day to shop;" but they soon had enough of that amusement, and when the small troubles and annoyances of daily life presented themselves to their inexperienced eyes, they looked back to the idle desultory time they had spent abroad with many regrets.

So much of the autumn as was left passed quickly away, and both saw the approach of Christmas with pleasure. It was to be spent at Iffley Court, with Lord and Lady Lennox. Mrs. Fortescue was in raptures to be once more in her old home, and, truth to tell, her husband was equally glad to return to his customary outdoor amusements of hunting and shooting, and more freedom than he had found it possible to have at Hampstead. For Georgy was still too young a wife to be able to endure her husband's leaving her alone for a day; while at Iffley Court it came in the natural order of things that gentlemen should go out and ladies sit at home, so there she bore it philosophically enough, only insisting on waiting for him in his room on his return, with warm slippers and dressing-gown, so as to have him all to herself for the half hour before dinner.

When the winter was past, the spring

found them again at Parkhurst Lodge, and early in June, when the days were longest, and the scent of may, lilacs, and syringa were even in that neighbourhood borne upon the air; when the young thrushes sang lustily all the day long, and the cuckoo, nothing disheartened by the mimicry of every idle boy, continued his monotonous call; their happiness was completed by the birth of a daughter, who in due time was christened Florence Gertrude, and who of course was pronounced to be the finest baby ever seen. Certainly Mrs. Fortescue believed so. She was enraptured with her new treasure, and would sometimes say, with tears in her eyes, that it frightened her to feel so happy. Poor young mother! it was a short-lived happiness, but the memory of those days remained with her through all her life, though she looked back on them in after years with pain. But now all was happiness and sunshine: her recovery

was rapid, her beauty heightened, and her husband more devoted than ever.

As soon as she was able to go out again she insisted on being driven to London to buy furniture for the nursery. "You can drive us all, Horace," she said.

"All! What do you mean by all?"

"Nurse and baby as well as me, of course."

"I drive Mrs. Roundabout and a baby through London, my dear Georgy? Impossible!" protested her husband, with a face of dismay.

"But what can I do? I want to get nursery furniture—I want to get pictures for the wall. It is of such consequence for children to have everything about them bright and cheerful. Besides, pictures teach so much."

"But you can't teach her now," said Horace doubtfully. "Can she see at all?"

"How ignorant all men are!" returned


his wife rather disdainfully. "You think babies are like puppies, I suppose. Why, baby was five weeks old yesterday. I certainly cannot put it off, and as to dear old nurse, that you so disrespectfully call Mrs. Roundabout, why, if she were here baby need not go, but as she is gone I cannot leave her."

"But, my dear Georgy, you do not mean to take the child about with you everywhere? I thought your mother had got you such a treasure of a nurse that you were never to have any anxiety about her."

"I am not exactly anxious about baby, for Evans has been with her ever since she was born, but then nurse was with her too."

"What, in heaven's name, is the good of having a nurse if she can't take care of baby while you drive to London!"

"I suppose she can, only, as she has never had her alone, I did not know if baby would be good with her. But I will see about it to-morrow."



As Mrs. Fortescue consented to accompany her husband to London the next day, it is to be supposed that in some incomprehensible manner she had contrived to elicit the baby's feelings with regard to her nurse. She, however, left that important personage in anything but a placid state of mind ; and, indeed, the directions and counter directions that she gave with regard to the child were quite enough to irritate a better tempered person than Mrs. Evans.

"If my mistress thinks I'm going to be dictated to like this, she's very much mistaken, and in the wrong box altogether," said Mrs. Evans to the little nurserymaid, who held her in great awe, as they stood together at the nursery window watching the carriage drive away. "It's never to be thought as I, who brought up all Lady Laura Vane's babies from the month, and lived in a nursery all my life, shouldn't know the fit time to take a baby out of doors. It may be shady enough

1

in the garden ; I'll be bound it is, and moping, too ; so I shall just take her out on the heath—do you go at once and bring up the dinner.”

“Yes, ma'am ; and please will you take beer or porter to-day with your dinner ?”

“Well, I think porter is the most refreshing this hot weather ; and tell the cook to send me some other vegetables besides potatoes. I never could dine off meat and potatoes alone.”

“Very well, ma'am,” was her obsequious reply, as she ran off to do her superior's bidding, wondering whether a walk on the heath was in store for her, too, that bright, warm summer day. But there was no such pleasure awaiting her. Mrs. Evans gave her some needlework to do while she was gone, not being at all desirous of her company, for, as soon as she knew that she should have the day to herself, she had sent a message

to an especial friend of her own to meet her on the heath that afternoon.

There was a kind of fair held there that day, and so many people in consequence that Mrs. Evans had to walk some distance before she could see any signs of her friend, who had been butler in Lady Laura Vane's house, and was now undecided whether to take a public-house with Mrs. Evans to assist him, or to procure another situation. She was soon tired of carrying the child under a scorching sun, and sat down on the first bench she could see. In a few minutes she saw her "friend" coming towards her, and they had a long and eager discussion upon their prospects, the baby conveniently assisting them by the soundness of its slumbers. At length the nurse looked at her watch, remarking that the child must not stay out any longer; "only just a minute," urged Mr. Parker; "you must not go till you have

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been into the booth to see the show. Really it is worth seeing—a dwarf and a giant, both so extraordinary that you will never forget them to your dying day.” Mr. Parker was right in this, for she never did.

“I can’t, Mr. Parker, indeed, take the baby into that crowd; I really couldn’t—besides it’s as much as my place is worth.”

A woman who had been sitting for some time on the same seat here interposed and said that she was quite ready to hold the baby for her if she liked to go. The nurse hesitated, but Mr. Parker was urgent, and at last she consented, saying, as she laid the child on the woman’s knee, “I shan’t be two minutes.”

“Two or ten it’s all the same to me,” replied the woman. “I’ve nothing to do,—pretty dear! how sound she sleeps!”

The nurse and her lover hurried away. As soon as they had mixed with the crowd and

were fairly out of sight, the woman's manner at once changed. She took up the baby and walked rapidly across the heath, ran down the hill into the London road, and never slackened her pace till she reached a public house where an omnibus was on the point of starting. She got in hastily. "The Strand—put me down in the Strand," she said, without any other reason for choosing that part of London than that it was the most crowded thoroughfare she could think of at the moment.

"All right, ma'am," said the conductor as he banged the door, and the unconscious infant was being whirled off to London before Mrs. Evans had sufficiently feasted her eyes on the wonders of the show. When they returned to the place where they had left the child, and saw the bench empty, Mrs. Evans uttered a shriek of dismay.

"Hush—sh," said her companion, "you'll

be getting a crowd round you, don't make a row, the child wouldn't sleep, maybe, and the woman's walking her about. I'll go and look, and I'm not so sure that this is where we left her."

"It is—oh! it is. It was you over-persuaded me to go!"

"Well, and what if I did, what are you so scared about? You may be sure folks don't steal such an article as that; a good deal more likely to give it away, I fancy."

He walked off rapidly in one direction and the nurse in another, but their search was of course ineffectual.

"Taken her home perhaps," he suggested.

"How could she? How could she know where her home was? But I must go there at once. There's a policeman. Oh! Parker, do call him!"

This was done, and as far as he could comprehend the nurse's distracted statement, he

wrote a description of the woman, and said that he would send at once to Scotland Yard in order that she might if possible be traced.

Mrs. Evans rushed into the house to see if any of the servants, finding the child with a stranger, should have carried her home, but that hope proving futile, she darted off again, declaring she could never again face Mrs. Fortescue.

Meanwhile Colonel Fortescue and his wife were driving rapidly home. When they arrived at the house he went to the stable to speak about one of the horses while she ran up to the nursery. The room was untenanted, every door and window wide open, and the whole house seemed unnaturally still and deserted. Mrs. Fortescue called repeatedly, but no one replied. She was on the point of ringing the bell violently when she heard a suppressed sob, and the little

18 COLONEL FORTESCUE'S DAUGHTER.

nursery-maid emerged from an inner closet, hiding her face in her handkerchief, and sobbing hysterically.

"Mary, where's baby?—and what's the matter?"

"Please, ma'am, she's lost, and Mrs. Evans is gone to look for her."

"Lost! what can you mean?—tell me, I desire, I command you!" And she almost shook the girl in the agony of her terror. But she could elicit nothing, and with wild frightened eyes flew down the stairs just as Colonel Fortescue was coming into the house and in time to see the housekeeper beckoning to him to come to her. Then she felt the girl's words were true, and only just able to gasp out "Horace—baby," she fell fainting on the floor.

"Poor lady! poor dear soul! I wanted you to tell her first, sir."

"Tell her what? What is it?" he asked,

utterly bewildered by the suddenness of all that had occurred.

The housekeeper told him in a few words the state of the case, and begged him to send a man on horseback to communicate at once with the police in London, "for there's no doubt now, sir, that, whether for her clothes or for the reward, some wicked wretch has kidnapped the sweet darling, so the sooner the reward is offered the better."

"Where is the nurse?" was his only reply, with a face pale and rigid in its sternness.

"She is not here, sir." Mrs. Gryll could say so with truth, and as she looked at Colonel Fortescue she was thankful to be able to say so.

He took his wife up in his arms, and carrying her as easily as if she were a baby, laid her still unconscious on the bed.

"I must go to the police-station myself,"

he said. "Has any description of the woman been forwarded there?"

"I think so, sir; a policeman came up just now to make inquiries."

"I must speak to him. Has Dr. Martin been sent for?"

"Yes." Mrs. Gryll had sent for him at once. "But, oh! sir, please don't leave my mistress yet, she's scarcely come to, and she never could bear, when she opens her eyes, to see no one about her but servants in such a trouble as this."

Colonel Fortescue hesitated.

"There is no time to be lost."

"But the doctor's sure to come directly," pleaded the housekeeper. "Maybe he'll give her something to make her sleep, then you could leave her."

Mrs. Gryll had seen much sorrow and much sickness in the course of her life, and knew better than her master the risk of such


a shock to a weak frame and excitable temperament.

Mrs. Fortescue seemed still only partly conscious, and had not yet spoken. Colonel Fortescue consented to wait till the doctor came, and, leaving Mrs. Gryll to watch his wife, he went down to the policeman. He had brought a written description of the woman who had taken the baby, and wished to obtain some further particulars from the nurse, but she was not to be found.

"The child's safe enough to be brought back as soon as the reward is offered—it's an old trick, sir," said the man.

"Any reward may be offered you think best—a thousand pounds if it would be advisable."

The policeman evidently did not think it would be, but, saying he would tell the superintendent the gentleman's wishes, carried off the hand-bills to be printed.



Colonel Fortescue had his horse saddled and brought round to the door, and then returned to his wife's room to await the arrival of the doctor.

He soon came, having heard the sad news by the way.

Mrs. Fortescue, utterly prostrated by the shock, lay in a kind of stupor. Dr. Martin prescribed as much quiet as possible, and an opiate to be given if she became restless, and then eagerly offered his assistance in their search for the child. He promised to come back in two hours, and to wait till Colonel Fortescue should return from London.

"Your wife will want watching, poor young thing! She has scarcely got up her strength yet, and this is a terrible trial, a terrible trial!" and the kind old man walked to the window, blowing his nose and wiping his spectacles, which had become very misty.

"Tell me, doctor," said Colonel Fortescue eagerly, "do you believe the poor child has been carried off for the sake of the reward? You don't believe that any one would—that any harm could happen to her?"

"No—certainly not—the child is safe enough somewhere, and as soon as the hand-bills are out she will be brought back in no time."

"Well, then, I'll just tell Georgy so before I go."

"Better not—better not—" said the more cautious doctor; "leave her alone, you will only make her restless. I left a good strong opiate, and I daresay if they give it her she will sleep all through the night."

The two men trotted off in different directions. Mrs. Fortescue had fallen asleep, and seemed to be sleeping quietly; but later in the evening she woke suddenly with a terrible consciousness of some calamity, though

for a long time she could not at all understand what had happened. Fortunately both her husband and Dr. Martin were in the house: "My darling! my darling! my precious baby!" wailed the poor mother. "Oh! Horace, if she had died I could have borne it, for then I should have known where she lay, and that no harm could befall her; but now—"

"You'll have her back in no time, never fear," said the doctor. "The handbills are posted all over London, and of course when the reward is known it will bring the child back at once."

"Do you think so?—are you speaking the truth? It's cruel if you are deceiving me."

"If you think that I would do so, why do you listen to what I say?" returned the doctor somewhat crossly. The fact was that his sympathy for the poor young mother was so great that he felt obliged to conceal it

under an appearance of gruffness, besides which he thought anything that would create a momentary distraction in her mind was good for her.

Sleep that night was procured for her by means of an opiate, and the next day she was quite calm, though very weak and depressed. A message had been sent at once to Iffley Court, and in the course of the morning Lady Lennox arrived. This was a great relief to Colonel Fortescue, who felt that he could now go to London and pursue his inquiries systematically without the fear of leaving his wife too long alone.

Early in the afternoon of the second day from the disappearance of the child, a cab drove rapidly up to the house, and the bell was rung gently, but before the servant could open the door, it had driven away, and no one was to be seen, nothing but a common wicker cradle that had been left

upon the doorstep. The man, without touching it, went immediately to call Mrs. Gryll, who, in her delight, scarcely glanced at the cradle, but rushed up to Lady Lennox's room to tell what had occurred, considering that she ought to have the happiness of breaking the good news to her daughter. With heartfelt thanksgiving she quickly followed the housekeeper into the hall, where a group of servants were standing round the cradle, speaking in whispers, and apparently perplexed. As they approached, the little nursery-maid seized Mrs. Gryll's arm, saying between laughing and crying, "Law! Mrs. Gryll, whichever of 'em is ours?"

"What do you mean, child?" exclaimed the housekeeper impatiently, kneeling down beside the cradle, and lifting up the coverlet, but she too looked up at Lady Lennox in dismay, when she saw two children dressed exactly alike!

"What a shameful trick! Which is our darling?" asked Lady Lennox. "I will call my daughter."

"Oh! my lady, stay one minute, for mercy's sake! Wait till we can tell which child to put into her arms as her own. I cannot tell—it is so very strange. Mary, you must know which is which?"

Mrs. Gryll lifted out one infant and Lady Lennox the other; they were exactly alike in dress, and had no distinguishing features either in form or colouring. Mary was silent. No one had an idea which was the missing child, and the servants shrank away from the cradle one by one, as from something uncanny and mysterious. There was a pause for a moment, in which Colonel Fortescue, who had just returned from London, hastily entered the hall.

Amazed at the scene before him, his one idea was that the child had been brought

back dead. When he saw a living infant in Lady Lennox's arms—for he had not noticed the housekeeper, who was standing aside and rather out of sight—he darted forward to take the child.

“My precious baby! where—who brought it?—and does not Georgy know?”

“No,” answered Lady Lennox, “there is a difficulty; two children were left at the door in this cradle.”

“Then that was the trick, was it?” he said joyfully, “to palm off another child upon us as well. Well, we will take it thankfully, as it gives you back to us, my treasure!” and he stooped over the baby and kissed it.

“I think this is our baby, sir,” said Mrs. Gryll, taking the child out of his arms and giving him the one she was holding.

“But, God bless me, you must know!” he said with a face of dismay. “All babies

look the same to me—but you women surely know?”

“But we cannot be quite sure, Horace,” said Lady Lennox; “and you see Evans is not here.”

“No, curse her,” he muttered angrily. “Well, I won’t have Georgy kept in suspense any longer, only tell me which it is, and I’ll take the child up to her.”

But no one could tell him, and the likeness between the two children was really remarkable. There was nothing distinguishable in size, feature, or colouring.

“Well, I shall tell Georgy,” he said after a pause. “It won’t do for her to be taken by surprise.”

In one moment Mrs. Fortescue was flying down the staircase into the hall.

“I shall know, only let me see,” she cried, kneeling down beside the cradle, as Mrs. Gryll had done. She stooped forward to

take up one baby and then the other. She evidently did not know.

"Oh! if nurse, dear old nurse were but here!" she said in great anxiety, turning to her husband.

"If that is all, she shall come at once. I will send the carriage in for her."

"Do, Horace, she will know of course; and the other poor baby—it must not be turned adrift, we must take care of it."

"Yes, to be sure," he answered rather vaguely, as the doubt of being able to identify his own child grew stronger every minute. But Mrs. Fortescue had no fear that the old nurse, who had been with the child from its birth, should not recognise her charge.

CHAPTER II.

And thou, my child,
 My heart misgave me when I looked upon thee.
 N. P. WILLIS.

They were Earth's purest children, young and fair,
 With eyes the shrines of unawakened thought,
 And brows as bright as spring or morning, ere
 Dark time had there its evil legends wrought
 In characters of cloud which wither not.

SHELLEY.

THE curiosity of the inhabitants of a small street in Bloomsbury was greatly excited when they saw a phaeton with a pair of horses stop at the small grocer's shop, over which Mrs. Cooper lodged.

Mr. Tucker hoped he was about to receive an unlimited order for cheese, that being the article upon which he especially prided him-

self ; but his expectations were soon dispelled by hearing his lodger open her window, and speak to the groom who was driving.

“ Why, Robert, is that you ? ”

“ Yes, the Colonel has sent the carriage for you, Mrs. Cooper, and I'm to take you back in a jiffy ; so will you please to come down at once.”

“ I'll come ; but what's wrong at the Lodge ? ” she asked eagerly. “ Is the baby ill ? ”

“ There's plenty wrong. Not exactly that, but I'll tell you as we go along.”

Mrs. Cooper in her black silk gown and clean white cap was always fit to be seen, and ready for any emergency, so beyond putting on her bonnet she had no preparations to make. She was the very ideal of a comfortable middle-aged woman, with a soft, fair, kind face, which still retained a good

deal of its youthful expression. She was rather portly, but scarcely merited Colonel Fortescue's disrespectful nick-name of "Mrs. Roundabout." She had been originally nurse in Lady Lennox's family, and had known Mrs. Fortescue from a child. Having been unfortunate in her marriage, she had taken to nursing as a means of livelihood, and Mrs. Fortescue insisted upon having her old nurse with her when she was confined.

Mrs. Cooper was soon ready, and having with some difficulty scrambled up into the seat, was soon on her way to Hampstead. As soon as the narrowness of the street obliged the groom to slacken his pace, she again asked what was the matter.

"Well, it's not as the child's ill, you see, but as it's been lost."

"Lost!" Mrs. Cooper looked perfectly aghast.

"Well, it's found now, I suppose, and

that's what's the matter," said the man, taking an evident pleasure in mystifying her.

"Oh! do tell me what you mean?" she said imploringly; "how ever could it be? How came the child to be out of Mrs. Evans's sight?"

"Why, she took it on the heath, and went a-sight-seeing or something herself, and let some woman hold it as went off with it. We," he said importantly, "were gone to London, but when we got home, my! what a set-out there was! Missis fainting, the Colonel swearing, and I going off for the doctor one minute and the police the next. The whole place seemed turned topsy-turvy."

"Of course—but the poor baby! and where was Evans?"

"Oh! she cut and run, and the best thing she could do too I should think, and look at the Colonel's face! Well, they sent

everywhere after her—posted hand-bills all over London, saying as the child was gone, and offering five hundred pounds reward.”

“But you say the child’s found?”

“Yes, that’s the queerest job of all, for only one was lost, and it’s two as is found; and no one for the life on ’em knows which is which, and that’s why I’m come for you.”

Mrs. Cooper was so perfectly overcome by this succession of startling intelligence that she was reduced to silence. At last she said thoughtfully,

“Of course I should know the baby, not as I had as much to do with it as Mrs. Evans, for to please Lady Lennox I let her take it from the first; and I’m not altogether so surprised as I might be, for she never seemed to me one as thought what she was going to do. She always did whatever she was going to do all in a minute, without what I call looking either before or behind. Lady

Lennox thought a deal of her, but I can't say as I ever did, but to please her I let her do as much as I could for the child."

"She's done something now with a vengeance, for she's lost one child and found two as one may say. Well, we've not done badly in the time," he continued, pulling out his watch, as he turned into the stable-yard. "Five miles in half an hour, and those narrow streets too."

As Mrs. Cooper entered the house by the back door, no one was aware of her arrival. She speedily found her own way into the nursery, where Mrs. Gryll and Mary were both sitting with a child in their arms. The former uttered a cry of pleasure when she saw who the visitor was. Mary liked Mrs. Cooper far better than Mrs. Evans.

"Oh! Mrs. Cooper," said Mrs. Gryll, "how thankful I am to see you! Does my mistress know that you are here?"

"No, I came up the back stairs. But, dear me, what a terrible time you have had of it here! Robert told me all that has happened as we came along. Why, this is the baby, sure enough!" she said as she took the child out of Mary's arms.

"Maybe," said Mrs. Gryll doubtfully. "Now look at this one?"

"Oh! this baby is ours," she persisted,— "at least I think so—I declare I'm not certain, after all! You see the dress makes them look so different. What a cruel, heartless trick it seems! After all I vow I'm not sure that it is either one or the other."

"For mercy's sake don't say that, or it will be the death of my mistress. Besides, only look at this baby—if that isn't Mrs. Fortescue's mouth exactly. You know we both noticed the baby's mouth just after it was born,—don't you remember, Mrs. Cooper?"

Yes, Mrs. Cooper remembered perfectly,

but was not convinced, for she thought the dark eyes and eyes-lashes of the child she had in her arms so very like its father.

“Well, if you like to take such a responsibility,” said Mrs. Gryll, “as to swear that the child on my knee is not Miss Fortescue, you may. I couldn’t, and I wouldn’t.”

Mrs. Gryll was rather an awful personage in Mrs. Cooper’s eyes, and she felt herself immediately snubbed into doubt again.

“Indeed, Mrs. Gryll, I was only just saying what I thought.”

“I don’t see that it’s any good for any of us to say only that,” she replied solemnly.

“Mary, you go and tell Lady Lennox that Mrs. Cooper is here; and don’t you let Mrs. Fortescue know, for your life.”

“Oh! Nurse, I am so glad to see you,” said Lady Lennox immediately obeying the nursery-maid’s summons. “So thankful, for my poor dear Georgy’s sake. She is so very

poorly still, and I perceive that she quite dreads to see the children till she can be sure which is her own."

"I'm sure, poor thing, I can't think how she has kept up at all," said the kind-hearted woman, with tears in her eyes; "and now, as I've been saying to Mrs. Gryll, babies look so different dressed like this, that it's hard to know 'em again."

"Undress them, then, and put them in other clothes. Was there any kind of mark on baby?"

"Not as I ever noticed, my lady, but Mrs. Evans always washed and dressed the child. You wished her to take the child from the first," said Mrs. Cooper, deprecatingly.

"I know I did, and I thought so well of her; but couldn't you be sure about it, Nurse? Because if baby had no mark on her, and there should be one on the other, that would settle it."

"I can't say, indeed, my lady ; Mrs. Evans is the only one as could say positive. I can't see now so very well, my eyes are not so good as they were."

- Lady Lennox's countenance fell. She had known Esther Evans from a child. She was niece to the housekeeper at Iffley Court, and Lady Lennox had always taken the greatest interest in her, and she felt sure that her present disappearance arose from shame and remorse at the effects of her carelessness. She believed her to be in concealment somewhere in London, but neither the exertions of the police, nor the numerous advertisements, had hitherto been successful in tracing her.

"Evans must be found," she said decidedly.

"I will write to-day to Iffley to know if her aunt has had any tidings of her. But as we cannot have an answer for two days, I think it would be better to send an express."

That wonderful annihilator of time and space, the electric telegraph, had not then been invented.

"I think your ladyship had better witness our examination of the infants," said Mrs. Gryll pompously, "before Mrs. Fortescue knows of Mrs. Cooper's arrival."

The children were accordingly undressed. Both were well-made, good-sized children, with little dark, downy heads, clear skins, and straight limbs.

"See, Nurse, here is a mark," said Lady Lennox, lifting up the hair of one baby, and showing a dark red mark underneath. "Did you ever see that on baby?"

"Never, my lady."

"Then you feel quite sure the child had not got it?"

"Indeed I couldn't say," pleaded Mrs. Cooper, really distressed; "for being under the hair, and never washing the baby, it

might be there and me not see it, for you see it's quite hid by the hair."

Lady Lennox bit her lip with vexation. Her last hope had failed her.

- "You see, my lady, I couldn't say as I was certain when I wasn't, to satisfy you. It would be doing such injustice to one or the other—my conscience wouldn't let me, indeed it wouldn't."

"Why, Mrs. Cooper, when you came in, you said first it was one and then the other," said Mrs. Gryll, rather contemptuously, "so it's plain enough you couldn't know. Mrs. Evans must be found."

But days passed into weeks, and notwithstanding the repeated advertisements, and every possible inquiry being made, no tidings could be obtained of the missing nurse. Both infants were still in the nursery at Parkhurst Lodge, but one was called Miss Fortescue, and laid in the bassinette covered

with muslin and lace ; the other, on which the mark had been noticed, in the common wicker cradle in which the children had been left.

In all other respects they were treated • and dressed exactly alike. Still no one felt that the decision was a right one. Mrs. Fortescue was perhaps the most determined not to entertain any doubt on the subject ; but occasionally when she was playing with her little Florence, a sudden misgiving would come across her that perhaps the other child, who was lying so still and unnoticed in its cradle, was her lost treasure ; and then, with a pang of unspeakable bitterness, she would put the child down, leave the nursery, and not return to it for the rest of the day. Her health and spirits had so completely given way under the sudden shock and the subsequent surprise, that, as time went on and she did not appear to rally, both her husband

and her mother began to entertain grave apprehensions about her. She had such an objection to the presence of a stranger, that Mrs. Cooper had consented to give up her home, and again establish herself in the nursery. She saw with sorrow the continual struggle that went on in Mrs. Fortescue's mind.

"Take them both to your heart, there's a dear good lady," she said one day, laying the child that at present was nameless on her knee. "It's the only thing that will do you any good."

But she could not, and only burst into tears at the old woman's words, and so no good was done to her.

CHAPTER III.

It means a drear monotony
 Of three feet square of smoky sky
 That cobwebs smother ;
 While years pass wearily away
 Over the task which makes one day
 So like another.

It means a sorrowful abyss
 That takes in sin and wretchedness,
 But cannot hide them ;
 And darker meanings lie beneath—
 So dark, that what we know of death
 Seems bright beside them !

London Life.

IN a wretched room in a miserable little alley within a stone's throw of the wealthiest and most fashionable part of London, sat two women, whose appearance entirely corresponded with the poverty of their abode. The room was on the ground-floor,

and though the month was July, there was a fire in the grate, which made the airless room still more oppressive. The younger of the two women seemed to feel it so, for she raised her head from the pillow on the table on which it had been resting, and begged to have the door open.

The elder was an active, middle-aged woman, the other little more than a girl; yet from the infant she held so tenderly in her arms, she was, though so very young, apparently a mother. The clothes of both were poor, and there were all the unmistakeable signs of extreme poverty, both about themselves and their habitation.

Notwithstanding a kind of likeness that existed between them, the mother and daughter, for such was the relationship, were very different.

Through all the appearances of poverty and neglect about the girl, there was a re-

finement not at all recognisable in the coarse features and rough manners of the elder woman. The girl's face was so wan and so sad that the extreme beauty of features which characterised it, was, as it were, shrouded in misery. The pale golden hair was tangled and dishevelled, the red lips parched and dry, and the delicate complexion belonging to that peculiar colouring, was alternately sallow and hectic. She looked weak and ill as she sat, wrapped in a shawl, looking down dreamily upon the babe on her knee; the tears which welled up into her eyes falling fast upon the face of the unconscious infant.

Mildred Clements was a complete contrast to her mother, who, at this moment, was evidently in anything but a complacent mood. Presently the baby began to cry. It was a strong, healthy child, and apparently determined not to be neglected any longer. It

steadily resisted poor Mildred's feeble attempts to quiet it.

"Drat that child ! can't you make it hold its noise, squalling like that, so that everybody in the Row must hear it."

"I can't help it, mother," said Mildred wearily. "She's hungry, I suppose."

"Give her to me, then. I suppose as long as she is here she must be fed, but I do hope it will please the Lord to take her to Himself before long."

This pious wish was uttered in the tone of a threat, and in a manner remarkably at variance with the words uttered.

"I'll take her away, mother, into the other room, out of your way."

"Nonsense ; I shall have to be plagued with her soon enough, so I may as well begin at once." And, in spite of her harsh manner, she took the child in her arms and began to feed it with both skill and tender-


ness. "Here's all this mending to be done, you had better lend a hand to it. What's the good of sitting all day with your hands before you, as if you were a born lady?"

Mildred made no reply, but a pang shot through her heart at her mother's words. How easily she might with one word justify herself, and yet that word must remain unspoken, for her lips were sealed by the solemn promise which had been extorted from her, and which, she felt, still bound her. "He that sweareth unto his neighbour and disappointeth him not, though it were to his own hindrance," rang in her ears, and seemed to her frightened imagination to be the most awful denunciation against her for even harbouring a wish to say the word which would at once appease her mother's displeasure.

Hers was an old and not uncommon story. A beautiful girl going to service while

yet very young, being petted and made much of by the family in which she lived, and especially by one who easily won her heart, and whom she soon learned to love with a blind idolatry. Weak and easily led by any one she loved, she was induced to consent to a clandestine marriage, which she was bound by the most solemn oaths to keep secret.

Her husband soon grew weary of one so utterly unsuited to him, and bitterly regretted his boyish infatuation. His false step had led to so much embarrassment, that he was not sorry to be ordered to join his regiment in India, especially as Mildred's approaching confinement made his position at home both difficult and dangerous. When he bade her farewell he spoke of a speedy return, though he knew that he might be kept away for years; but, heartless as he had proved himself, he could not bear to tell her this, and made, as far as he could, every



provision for her comfort. He sent a confidential servant from Liverpool before he sailed, with all the money he could spare, which he desired him to take to Mildred, with a letter containing the strongest injunctions to keep their marriage secret. But neither money nor letter ever reached her, and she was obliged to go to her mother for assistance and protection, without the consolation of being able to give her her confidence, or to relieve her mind of the burden which the shame of her daughter's position brought upon her. And yet it was not so much the disgrace that Mrs. Clements lamented, not the sin of which she believed her daughter to have been guilty that weighed upon her mind, but the trouble and expense it must of necessity bring upon herself.

"You are well enough now," continued her mother, "to look for a place. I ain't going to keep you and the child, and you

sitting all day with your hands before you doing nothing."


"I don't feel strong enough to take a place, mother; besides, how can I leave the child?"

"Can or not, you must. I'll see to the child, as far as I am able; and as to strength, why, you'll get none here, living on what would not keep a sparrow. You would get up your strength far quicker in service."

"Then I won't go, mother. I won't leave my baby, my precious baby—all I have to love now, for you hate her; I know you do, and I daresay would let her pine away, and be glad that she was dead."

Then she stood up, clasping the child tightly, and, with flushed cheeks, glaring at her mother like a young tigress.

"Hoity toity, here's a to do! And who's to keep her, I'd be glad to know? If you've the money, well and good; and if not, more



fool you not to have got it from them as is bound to give it you."

"But he's gone—gone to foreign parts," replied the girl in a tone of despair.

"Get money from the family, then—they can't refuse you."

"Never!" said the girl, turning deadly pale, for the momentary excitement had exhausted her. "Never!"

"Well, you may do what you choose, but it must be something. I saw your aunt a few days ago, and she promised to get you a place."

"I want no place of my aunt's getting, she's no friend to me," said Mildred rather sulkily.

"Friendly is as friendly does, I think," returned the other. "If she helps you to a place I don't see what more you can want."

"I want nothing," said the girl drearily. "Give me the child, mother," and taking it

in her arms into the inner room, she laid it down on the wretched pallet that served them for a bed; then took her place beside it, and soon fell asleep.

Mrs. Clements stitched on in silence. She called Mildred once or twice, but receiving no answer, at last got up and looked through the door. She stood still for a moment in surprise to see the mother and child sleeping so soundly.

"Well, I suppose those young things can sleep through any trouble," she muttered, "and Mildred does look pale and thin. I suppose she's hardly up to taking a place; not as I'd let her know I thought so." The mother's heart was not extinct, though deadened by selfishness and the cark and care of her daily life.

She sat down again to her sewing, till the last rays of the setting sun told of evening, and then she hastily rose and set about mak-

ing the tea. As she was bustling about the room a shadow fell across the door, and looking up she saw the postman, a very unusual visitor in — Row.

As soon as Mrs. Clement had read the letter which he brought, she was obliged to wake her daughter to inform her of its contents. It was from her sister, who was living as housekeeper to a family in the country, offering to take Mildred as still-room maid.

"Of course, as she will be always with me, I can help her on in many ways," the letter said, "only she must be steady, and, above all, keep her own secret, or I shall lose my place for certain."

"There's a chance for you, Mildred!" said her mother joyfully. "Such a good place, and Rebecca will be sure to take care of you, as she says; and, you see, she will take you without a character, and that couldn't be in any other place, you know."

The girl's face flushed. She saw all the advantages of the situation, and felt also how necessary it was that she should work to support her child.

If she only could find a place in London, so as not to leave it! She hinted something of that to her mother in reply.

But Mrs. Clements declared indignantly that the thing was impossible, and that if Mildred chose to turn her back on such a piece of good fortune she wouldn't pretend to take charge of the child at all ; so, with a good deal of labour and some altercation, a letter was written in reply, accepting the offer, and saying that Mildred would be ready to go down to Stapleford Hall in a week.

Many times during that week did Mildred's heart fail her, and if she had not been afraid of her mother's anger, she would at the last minute have thrown up the place. Her only

comfort was in remembering that the family spent some months in London every year, and that then she should be able to see her child.

"I'll ask my aunt to advance my wages, mother, to send you ; you will get everything for baby that you think she wants."


Her mother promised to "see to the child," and, with bitter tears and an aching heart, Mildred Clements exchanged her miserable abode for the luxurious mansion of Stapleford Hall.

Mrs. Clements really intended to do what she could for the child, but she found it a terrible hindrance. Occasionally a neighbour relieved her of the burthen for a few hours, or she would give some child a halfpenny to nurse it while she did her ironing—for she took in as much washing as she could manage alone, and upon this she mainly subsisted.

When Mildred had been gone about a

week, Mrs. Clements had occasion one day to go to Hampstead. The weather was sultry, and tired with the walk she sat down on a bench to rest. No one would have recognised her, dressed neatly in the remnants of better days, as the untidy ragged-looking woman in the miserable room we have described.


It was the same seat as that on which Mr. Parker and Mrs. Evans sat discussing their future plans. They talked loud and eagerly, so that Mrs. Clements learnt a good deal of their affairs as well as their present abode. Neither of them appeared to notice her at all, till she offered to hold the baby while the nurse went to see the show. The offer was made in simple kindness and good faith; but, when once the child was in her arms, a sudden temptation seized her to carry it off, for the sake of the reward that she felt sure people as rich as those who



lived at Parkhurst Lodge would be sure to offer.

This was her only idea as she carried the child across the heath, and found herself jostled by the crowd in the Strand. But as she took it home she began to consider how it was possible to let the police know where the child was without implicating herself. Then the idea of taking back both children occurred to her. She would not receive any reward, but it would free her from the child who was becoming a greater burthen upon her every day, and which she for ever wished had never been born, and often that it were dead. She worked so hard all day that the broken rest the care of a baby entailed was a greater trial than she could bear, and the more she thought of this plan of ridding herself of it, the more feasible it seemed. It would in the end, too, be far better for Mildred ; but what could she tell

her? That was her only difficulty ; she would consider that later. She would go to Hampstead for a few days to see a sister-in-law who lived there, and she could say that the child died while she was there, so as not to give rise to any comments from the neighbours. All night she lay awake, pondering over this scheme, and in the morning she was determined to put it in execution. She told her sister-in-law that she had left the child in — Row with a neighbour, who had offered to take care of it, while she, having been poorly, had come to Hampstead for a few days for a change and rest. But before she went to her sister-in-law's house she had left both children, in a cradle she had bought expressly for the purpose, at Parkhurst Lodge.




CHAPTER IV.

With blackest moss the flower-plots
 Were thickly crusted, one and all :
 The rusted nails fell from the knots
 That held the peach to the garden wall.

TENNYSON.

“Dial! here we need not thee,
 Marking off the hours that flee,
 With thine iron-finger's shade
 On the iron index laid.
 Faded blossom, withered leaf,
 Mix with joy enough or grief,
 Warning us that time is brief.”

MRS. FORTESCUE'S health and spirits did not rally satisfactorily from the shock that the loss of her child, though for so short a time, had been to her. The strange uncertainty that hung over the children, and that must, as far as she could tell, for ever



hang over them, kept her in a state of continual anxiety and depression. For many months she expected that Evans, when she knew that the baby was safe, would return and give her testimony as to their identity. All the advertisements had been altered, and every possible inducement held out to her to return, but no tidings of her were obtained. It was as if she had totally disappeared from the face of the earth! Could she, in her despair, have committed suicide? was a question that sometimes arose, but her mistress never believed it, and clung to the hope, though it grew fainter every day, of her return. Mrs. Fortescue was aware that she often felt both dislike and resentment towards the unconscious infant that shared her nursery; and then the recollection that the child might possibly be her own, would fill her with remorse, and it was evident to all, especially to Nurse Cooper, that the sight of

the children was far more pain than pleasure to her.

Mrs. Cooper expressed this idea one day to Lady Lennox. "Depend upon it, there's but one thing for Mrs. Fortescue to do, my lady, and that is, to go away from this place, to live for awhile where there is nothing to remind her of all she has gone through. You see she takes her trouble hard, and when people do that it's much worse for them, for time seems to make it worse instead of better."

"I will talk to Colonel Fortescue about it," said Lady Lennox thoughtfully; "I wish he would take Georgy abroad, she enjoyed travelling so much when she first married."

Lady Lennox took the first opportunity of speaking to Colonel Fortescue, and found him quite ready to fall in with her views, especially as the shadow which had fallen on his house had made it more or less distaste-

ful to him. When he proposed to his wife that they should spend the ensuing summer abroad, she felt that he wished it for his own pleasure as well as for her health. Restless and unhappy, and glad of any change, she made no objection to the scheme. As Lady Lennox had offered to take the children to Iffley Court, and to have the entire charge of them while her daughter was abroad, Colonel Fortescue determined to dispose of the remainder of the lease of the villa at Hampstead, and to find another and permanent home when they returned.

All being thus satisfactorily arranged, the summer found them established in a lovely villa near Florence ; and though, on revisiting the scenes of their former tour, Mrs. Fortescue felt how changed she was, and that her former light-heartedness never could again be hers, still the variety of interests and the beautiful scenery had their

effect, and Colonel Fortescue was able to say, in his letters to Lady Lennox, that he believed "Georgy was becoming just what she used to be."

But both were unwilling to return to England, and they lingered on through the winter, and again till the spring had deepened into summer, and then Colonel Fortescue began to talk seriously of the necessity of going back to England. Of late too Mrs. Fortescue had been often indisposed, and he was inclined to believe that whatever good she was to derive from the change had been effected. But when her illness was accounted for by the fact that she was again expecting to become a mother, a long journey was then pronounced to be impossible. They took a house at Nice, and remained there till she presented her husband with a son and heir.

The birth of this boy was a source of great happiness to Colonel Fortescue, who, in due

time, was to inherit a fine old property from his uncle. But Mrs. Fortescue's recovery was tedious. She was long regaining her strength, and, for the sake of the child, it was thought advisable to procure an Italian peasant to act as its nurse. The difficulty of removing this woman from her native place induced them again to put off their journey to England for another year; but in the meantime little Ferdinand, who had been a puny baby, grew into a strong and healthy boy, and his father loved him with such doting affection that everything gave way to his welfare. At length the illness of Colonel Fortescue's uncle made his return absolutely necessary; and exactly four years after they had left it, Colonel and Mrs. Fortescue, with their new treasure, drove up to Iffley Court.

"Isn't he a beauty, mamma?" said Mrs. Fortescue, as she put her son into her mo-

ther's arms; "and is he not the image of Horace?"

"He is indeed, and such a fine little fellow. You look very well, too, Georgy."

"I am well now; one is so much better abroad," she replied with a sigh, looking round as if expecting to see the other children.

Lady Lennox had purposely sent them away till she had seen her daughter. Now she called them to her.

"Come, darlings, and see papa and mamma, and make acquaintance with your little brother," and taking each child by the hand, she led them up to Mrs. Fortescue. "This is Florence; and this is Magdalen. I called her so after my mother," she said in a low voice. "I asked you about it, but you did not reply. You don't dislike the name, Georgy, I hope?"

"Oh! no, it's a very pretty name," she re-

plied indifferently, stooping down to kiss the children. The two little girls hung back, looking shy and unhappy, for though Mrs. Cooper and Lady Lennox had constantly talked about "papa and mamma," their idea of them was very vague and mythical, and when a live lady and gentleman came to claim their affection, they felt that they had none to give, and as if grandmamma was the only person they could really love.

They were pretty children ; both had dark hair and eyes, and though, in other respects, they were not the least alike, they might very well pass for sisters. Florence was the most striking-looking of the two. Her skin was exquisitely white, and she was at least half a head taller than Magdalen. Her manner and bearing, too, was less shy and more decided, and in all that they did she evidently took the initiative. Colonel Fortescue watched them with deep interest, and,

as soon as his wife and Lady Lennox left the room he called them to him.

"Tell me your name, and how old you are," he said, taking Florence on his knee.

"Florence Gertrude Fortescue, and I was five years old on my birthday."

"And yours?" he asked, turning to the other child.

"Magdalen Fortescue," was the timid reply, looking appealingly to her sister to speak for her.

"Magdalen didn't have a birthday, so I don't know how old she is," said Florence patronisingly. "Are you our papa? and have you brought us a present, as nurse said you would?"

"We will see about that presently," he said. "Now take me to nurse, I should like to see her."

Mrs. Cooper looked much as she did when Colonel Fortescue left England; dressed as

usual in her black silk ; her face as fair and kind, and but little older.

"They are sweet children, sir, ain't they?" she said, in return to his greeting. "But I can't see a bit of likeness to any one."

"We must not raise that question any more, nurse," he said gravely ; "I am very well satisfied with them as they are. Little Ferdinand must make up to Mrs. Fortescue for the past !"


"He is a beautiful boy, sir," she said warmly, but she was not quite satisfied at his way of disposing of the little girls, for she was very much attached to them, especially to Florence.

A few weeks later old Mr. Fortescue died, and his nephew became the possessor of Waverton, a fine old property in the North of England. He had always been an eccentric man—an old bachelor, who lived alone, and who for years had done nothing towards

keeping up the place ; so that, when Colonel Fortescue went to take possession of it, he found that so much was necessary to be done that it would be very long before it could be fit for habitation. For a time, therefore, they all lived at Iffley Court. Their society was a great pleasure to Lady Lennox, whose life was a sad one, being devoted to the care of her husband, who was now a helpless cripple. Though apparently a strong man at the time of his daughter's marriage, he had been suddenly struck down by paralysis in the prime of his life. Of late too his intellect appeared to be failing, so that his wife was entirely without companionship ; and, though her love and affection for him never changed, the terrible shadow of imbecility which hung over him gave her the feeling of being chained to a living corpse. During his illness the two little girls had been the one bright spot in her dreary life,

and she shrank from the idea of parting with them. She had wished to keep Magdalen with her entirely, but Colonel Fortescue would not hear of the children being separated, so the necessity of their continuing to live with her was a real boon.

Waverton Hall was a picturesque house, built of stone, which from age and lichen had acquired the soft grey tint that harmonizes so well with the beautiful scenery that usually surrounds a fine old place. But its present appearance was desolate in the extreme. The grass had been allowed to grow over the carriage-road from the Lodge to the house; the iron gates that enclosed the square court in which the house stood were off their hinges, and remained propped up against the wall. What had been the garden was now a tangled mass of weeds. The fountain which had been in the middle was dry and broken, and even the sun-dial, to which



the straight walk, the only one which appeared to have been ever trodden, led, was so covered with green moss that any note it kept of the lapse of time must have been unheeded for years. The house, with its massive walls and mullioned windows, hardly gave the same impression of desolation, though the roof was completely out of repair. The wide staircase, the fine hall, and the panelled walls covered with pictures, made the house look almost liveable, in spite of the stiff old furniture and faded damask with which the rooms were hung.

However, the view from the windows was very lovely ; and Colonel Fortescue was not disposed to spare any trouble or expense in the restoration of the place ; for was it not to be the inheritance of little Ferdinand ?

CHAPTER V.

Standing with reluctant feet,
Where the brook and river meet,
Womanhood and childhood fleet.

.
Like the swell of some sweet tune
Morning rises into noon,
May glides onward into June.

LONGFELLOW.


AFTER a lapse of ten years, which were not marked by any particular changes in the family at Waverton, beyond that of Florence and Magdalen Fortescue from childhood to girlhood, we must take another look at the old place in its new and improved aspect. There was nothing desolate or gloomy about it now ; on the contrary, it was as bright and sunny a home as could be

found in the length and breadth of "merrie England."

The house had been built on the side of a hill, so that, as the ground was higher on the north side than on the south, it was possible to walk out from the rooms on the upper story, as well as from the library and other rooms on the ground-floor. These rooms faced the south, and looked over the magnificent view in front. The garden also faced the south, and the living-rooms opened upon a gravel platform, that was almost too wide to be called a terrace. There were two broad walks, between which was a lovely garden, and on the right was a lawn, on which stood some fine cedars. These were backed by the shrubbery and plantation connecting the terrace with the ground which lay below. Two large broad flight of steps led from the terrace to a sloping bank; while, far beneath, a lake rested tranquilly in the valley, and

the eye would travel far over undulating ground and well-wooded land, till its progress was arrested by a line of downy hills, partially covered with fine timber.

The interior of the house had not been materially altered. It had been sufficiently modernized for comfort, but without losing any of its distinctive character. There was one suite of rooms on the upper story which had always been appropriated to the children, and, when the time came for the annihilation of nurseries and school-room, they had been refurnished at considerable expense for the two girls. These rooms consisted of a bedroom, two dressing-rooms, and a good-sized sitting-room. The latter opened into a garden which had always been their especial property. One dressing-room was much larger than the other, and this was accessible both from the bedroom and sitting-room, and had also a door into the passage. Florence,




in her right of being the eldest, had taken possession of this room. The other dressing-room was much smaller, and the only entrance to it was through the bedroom.

Florence was now past eighteen ; Magdalen said to be only seventeen. Her birthday had been fixed for the 1st of August, Colonel Fortescue having borne in mind what Florence had said to him on his return to England about Magdalen "having no birthday."

Their sitting-room, or, as the servants called it, "the young ladies' boudoy," was a very charming room, cheerful even in the depth of winter. There was a large oriel window looking to the south, and a smaller one to the east, which opened into the garden. The walls, which were pale grey, were hung with a few water-colour drawings and some fine prints. The red carpet and gay chintz gave an abundance of colour to the room,

which was fitted up with books on one side, and a pianoforte and easel for drawing on the other. In the oriel window was a flower-stand, which both in winter and summer was always full of plants.

It was in this room that Florence and Magdalen Fortescue spent all their mornings. In spite of the change from childhood to early womanhood, they both retained their distinctive characteristics. Florence was still in appearance the most striking, for Magdalen was perhaps rather too pale, though without any appearance of ill-health about her. Her eyes were especially lovely, those large, brown, velvety eyes which are so peculiar, and so seldom seen except in some animals; very delicately-pencilled eyebrows, and a profusion of soft dark hair. She was not as tall as her sister, though her figure was slight and graceful. Florence was built on a larger scale, her hair and eyes were not so dark,



and her brilliant complexion and animated countenance seemed to cast Magdalen's more refined beauty into the shade. There was not the slightest resemblance between the two, and yet, from having in some degree the same voice and manner, and being always dressed exactly alike, no one ever noticed the want of it.

The two girls were sitting in this room one sunless December morning. Magdalen was copying music; Florence sitting with her feet on the fender doing nothing at all. Presently there was a knock at the door, followed by the entrance of a servant, who said that the coachman wished to know "if the young ladies were going to ride this morning?"

"I don't know; I will send to the stables later if we want the horses. Why does he ask?" said Florence impatiently.

"I believe he is going to take the carriage

to Lexborough at three o'clock," replied the man, "and he thought the horses might be wanted this morning."

If Colonel Fortescue did not ride with his daughters the old coachman always accompanied them.

"It's too cold to ride, isn't it, Maggie?" said Florence to her sister, as the man left the room.

"I don't know; but I could not go out this morning—look here!" and she pointed to a parcel of new books that were scarcely unfolded.

"What are they?" said Florence, reading over the names without much attention. "You see, Magdalen, that the carriage going to Lexborough means that mamma is going to meet his Royal Highness to-day."

"What *do* you mean, Florence?" asked Magdalen, looking up from her writing in surprise.

"That Prince Ferdinand is coming, of course. Mamma would not go out to-day for anyone else."

"Oh! Florence, that is so wrong!"

"What is wrong? To call him Prince Ferdinand? I am sure we all treat him as if he was something very wonderful—not at all like a common schoolboy."

"I wonder mamma didn't tell us," returned Magdalen, thoughtfully.

"Does she ever tell us anything about Ferdinand? It's as if we were in some way different. I daresay men are always treated as superior beings—and boys, too, perhaps. The 'Lords of creation,' as they are called," and Florence's lip curled with scorn and some temper.

"I don't think so; it's only that mamma cares much more for him than for us, and now and then I think papa does too."


"Perhaps, but I don't feel it in the same

way with him. Sometimes I think things very odd, Magdalen."

"What things?" Magdalen asked ; but Florence did not reply, for at that moment Colonel Fortescue entered the room. He was still an extremely handsome man, though his hair was tinged with grey, and his figure a trifle less erect than it had been when he took possession of Waverton. He was very fond of both the girls, but preferred Florence as a companion. Magdalen was rather afraid of him, just enough to be occasionally an irritation, but Florence's high spirit and independent temper suited him exactly.

"I am going to drive to Broome Hall," he said ; "would either of you like to go with me?"

"I should, papa," said Florence eagerly ; "Nash sent up just now to ask if we were going to ride, but if we go with you we shall not want him."



"No; he must go with the carriage to Lexborough. Are you going with your mother, Magdalen, or with me?"

"I don't suppose I am going with mamma," she said timidly, "but I had rather not ride to-day."

"Maggie has a friend at home," said Florence laughing—"Mrs. Hemans, that it would break her heart to leave," and she held up one of the books that had just arrived.

"But, my dear, you can read at any time. Is it good for you to stay at home?" said her father kindly.

"Oh! yes, papa, nothing is so good for people as to do what they like, as we are both going to do to-day," said Magdalen.

"What time shall you go?" asked Florence.

"At once, I think—as soon as you are ready."

"But who lives at Broome Hall, papa? I

didn't know that it was let since old Mrs. Roper died?"

"Yes, it has been bought by Admiral Vivian, a queer old fish, but I knew him once, and, as he is such a near neighbour, I must be civil to him; I think he has some nephews and nieces living with him."

"I am glad of that; I like to see new people. I wonder you don't want to go, Magdalen."

"No, thank you," she replied, with rather a sad smile.

"I know what your face says, Magdalen—that a moment ago I advised you not to go if you did not like; and so I do still, only I wonder that you don't like it. Will you tell mamma where I am gone?"

Magdalen nodded as Florence left the room. She did not long continue her occupation, but presently pushed her writing impatiently away, and walked to the window,

where she stood watching the retreating figures of her father and sister, as they cantered across the park. As she looked after them her eyes filled with tears, but, hastily wiping them away, she sat down resolutely to read the books from which Florence had declared it would break her heart to be parted. Magdalen was fond of poetry, and had a sensitive appreciation of the beautiful. She read on till the gong summoned her to luncheon. Mrs. Fortescue came into the dining-room immediately after her.

"Only you, Magdalen?" said her mother, in a tone of surprise—Magdalen thought of disappointment. "Where is Florence? and is your father out?"

"They are riding to Broome Hall. Florence asked me to tell you, mamma."

"Have you been at home alone all the morning, my dear? Why didn't you come to my room?"

Magdalen's heart beat quickly, and her cheeks flushed as she replied, "I was reading, mamma."

"Oh!" said her mother indifferently, "then the books are come from the library. I am glad of that, you will have them to amuse you this afternoon, for I am going to Lexborough to meet Ferdinand."

Mrs. Fortescue's conscience reproached her as she said this—for why should not Magdalen go with her? And yet she felt that she could not give up the pleasure of having her darling to herself for the first hour.

Magdalen was silent for a few minutes; and then, afraid that her mother might think her annoyed, said,

"I did not know that Ferdinand was coming to-day."

"I did not expect him for a week, but Mr. Lindsay has been obliged to go to his mother, who is dying, and begged us to let Ferdy

come home at once. Dear boy! I was only too glad to have him sooner."

Both Magdalen and Florence had an abiding conviction that the love their mother felt towards them was of a very different nature from that she entertained towards their brother. Florence resented it extremely, was often very angry, and then forgot it till some mark of preference shewn to Ferdinand brought it again before her. Magdalen was never angry, often unhappy and morbid, and seldom forgot it, for she loved her mother with a depth and entireness that demanded a return. But occasionally there was a fitfulness in Mrs. Fortescue's manner that precluded the loving confidence that should exist between grown-up daughters and a mother who is still young, and erected a kind of barrier between them.

These thoughts, however, did not press upon Florence, as she cantered gaily beside

her father till they came to the gates of the lodge at Broome Hall.

"Well, Mrs. Wilson, so you've got the house inhabited at last," said Colonel Fortescue to the clean old woman who opened the gates for them.

"Yes, your honour, and it's a good thing for we as it ain't empty any more ; for the Admiral's a kind master, and Mr. Philip too."

"Who is Mr. Philip?" asked Florence.
"It's not a pretty place at all ; and a frightful house !" she continued, without waiting for an answer to her question, as they rode up to the door.

It was a modern Grecian house, with a large ugly portico ; but the park, though not extensive, contained some fine trees, and the ground was tossed about in a picturesque manner. There was plenty of lawn, shrubbery, and kitchen-garden, and a great deal

of glass, which caught a few struggling sunbeams, and attracted Florence's eye.

"There seems no flower-garden, and what a pity not to have a conservatory near the house!"

Her father laughed at her tone of displeasure, as he said,

"Here is the Admiral, you had better tell him how much you disapprove of his new abode."

Florence thought she disapproved quite as much of the man as of his dwelling. He was so exceedingly ugly, and ugliness was so distasteful to her; it was almost a crime in her eyes. Everybody would have been struck as she was, till the kind, genial manner, the benevolent expression, and the good, honest eyes had effaced the impression which the Admiral's clumsy thick-set figure and his coarse features could not fail to produce.

"I never saw so wide a mouth, nor such thick lips; he is like a white negro," she thought as he hastened up to meet them.

"How do you do, Fortescue?—how do you do? This is really kind, to come so soon and welcome me into your neighbourhood. How well you are looking; and this pretty young lady your daughter, I suppose? Come in, my dear, come in, and let me send your horses round to the stables."

"I wish papa wouldn't go in," she thought, "and the man need not call me 'my dear.'" Florence looked stiff and stately, as she followed up the steps into the house, into a smart, uninteresting room without a fire, and with the red satin furniture carefully shrouded in brown holland. There were several good pictures on the wall. Florence walked straight up to a beautiful Murillo, and looked at it long and earnestly.

"Ah! Fortescue, you must remember that picture," said the Admiral, pleased at Florence's discrimination in immediately singling it out. "I got it in Spain, the year you were quartered at Gibraltar. You were only a youngster then. How time flies, to be sure!"

"You don't seem to feel its effects much at all events, Admiral. But why do you bring us here, as if we were formal visitors? I should like you to take us into your own snugery, and give this child a glass of wine and a biscuit, if you will be so kind, for we came out before luncheon."

"To be sure I will; but we can do better for her than that, I think, though this is only a bachelor's house. Master Philip is too fond of his creature comforts not to keep Mrs. Edwards well up to her work. Here, Harper, bring some luncheon into my room immediately."

"Hot luncheon, sir?" asked the man respectfully.

"Not for me," interposed Florence eagerly. "I like cold luncheon much the best."

"Cold meat and wine, then. Where is Mr. Philip?"

"Out shooting, I believe, sir."

"He is always out when I want him. But come into my room, it is warmer, and I daresay he will be in presently."

The Admiral's "den," as he called it, was certainly warm enough; too hot, Florence thought, as she took off her hat and handkerchief, and then wondered where she could find a place to put them down; for the one ugly table that filled up the room was covered with books, papers, pamphlets, fishing-rods, string of all sizes and lengths, spectacles without cases, and cases without spectacles, cigar-cases, broken pipes, coppers, pencils, pens, and an inkstand, probably un-

equalled in its dirt and dilapidated condition. There were not many chairs, but the few that did exist were stiff, hard, and comfortless. There was a cupboard with glass doors on one side of the room, containing guns; on the other was a bookshelf, on which were more fishing-rods than books, with a case of odd-looking stuffed birds on the top. There was a live parrot on a perch, and a magnificent great dog lying before the fire, who rose and walked round the strangers; and then, apparently thinking them not worth much attention, deliberately went to sleep again.

“Grison, for shame! be civil and shake hands with the lady,” said the Admiral; and the dog immediately rose and laid one heavy paw upon Florence’s knee.

“What a beautiful dog!” she said, stooping down to pat his head. “Have you had him a long time?”

"He is not my dog, he belongs to Philip, but condescends to patronize me when he is out. Here is a picture of both," he said, pointing to a water-colour sketch over the chimney-piece, of a tall, fair man in a shooting dress, with the dog by his side. It was a kind, good face, not regularly handsome, but one that was very pleasant to look upon.

"Yes, that is Philip and Grison," repeated the Admiral absently, as he stood before the picture. "How very like his mother he has grown!"

The entrance of a servant with the luncheon tray made a diversion. But the Admiral was too much provoked at his nephew's absence to do anything but grumble, and entreat them to wait till his return. This, Colonel Fortescue said, was quite impossible, as Florence would be out much too late if they did not hurry back.

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"My boy will be at home to-day, Admiral. If you and your nephew would come and stay with us for a few days I daresay we should be able to give you some shooting."

The Admiral readily agreed to this, and Florence rode away from the house with feelings that were considerably mollified towards the old man.

"What do you think of my friend, Florence?" said her father as they rode away; "I saw that you were not prepossessed in his favour at first."

"Oh! papa, he was so very ugly."

"Was! *Is*, I suppose you mean."

"No, I don't. He was at first, but afterwards when he spoke he altered so much. He has such a good, kind face. How fond he seems of his nephew! Do you know him?"

"I must have seen him as a boy, but not since then. I have heard that he has grown

up into a very fine young fellow. But the Admiral loves him for his mother's sake, I suppose. Since her death Philip has always lived with his uncle.

Florence looked as if she wished to hear more, and her father continued :

“ Mrs. Vivian was a very beautiful woman, and the Admiral, when quite young, fell desperately in love with her, without knowing that she was engaged to his elder brother. When he discovered it he could not recover from the blow, and left England, meaning never to return. He scarcely ever did so during her life, but lived in a villa that he took in the south of France, whenever he was on shore. He and his brother were on very friendly terms, but he never could make up his mind to see her. Philip, his brother's second son, was always his favourite from the likeness to his mother, and now he has adopted him entirely.”

"Poor old man! And he looks so happy—as if he had never known a care."

"I should doubt if that had ever been the case in any life," returned her father; "but brave hearts like Vivian's do not show their care. He was a capital officer, one of the most generous, warm-hearted men I ever knew. He was very kind to me when I was quartered at Gibraltar."

"That was when he bought his Murillo, he said. I think he is a charming old man, papa, now I know more about him, but at first I only thought how ugly he was. He shall be my particular favourite when he comes to stay with us; but I hope he will bring his beautiful great dog."

"That is Philip's dog; but whenever we send the invitation, Grison shall have a card all to himself, if you like."

CHAPTER VI.

See! the tranquil moon is shining
 On the smooth reflecting sea,
 Glittering on the glassy surface
 Of the Lake of Galilee.

See the stars of thousand eyes—
 Jewels in the winter sky,
 Glisten in the far horizon,
 Glisten out full cheerfully.

Soft! and list! a heavenly chorus,
 Angel music from above;
 Whose full notes harmonious blending
 Tell of a Redeemer's love.

"Christmas Night." F. C. T.

FLORENCE and her father rode up to the house just as Mrs. Fortescue and Ferdinand were getting out of the carriage. He was a tall, fair, bright-complexioned boy, with a countenance that had no especial characteristic beyond good, honest eyes, and

a frank expression. His mother thought him a paragon of perfection, in spite of his frequent ebullitions of temper. His father, though extremely fond and proud of him, judged him more fairly. Between him and Florence a considerable antagonism existed ; but Magdalen he was really very fond of, after his own selfish, boyish fashion.

“Flo was so often cross, but Maggie was jolly and good-natured,” was his own description of his sisters. Magdalen was far more patient with him than Florence, and won his heart by helping him to make fishing-flies, showing him how to string his bow, and, above all, by decyphering his holiday task, and copying it legibly from the scrawl in which he had written it. He usually succeeded in getting his own way with every one except Florence, so it was not surprising that he was selfish and inconsiderate towards the rest of the world, or that he was not

particularly fond of her. But at the moment of arrival, in the exuberance of delight at returning home, he was full of affection for everybody. Magdalen had come downstairs at the sound of wheels, and the whole party were assembled together in the hall.

"Then you didn't go to Lexborough, Magdalen?" said her father, looking surprised when he saw her come down to receive Ferdinand's hearty greeting; "how was that?"

"I did not go out, papa."

"Why not? Georgy, why did you let this child stay at home all day? It is not good for her."

He spoke gravely. Mrs. Fortescue's extreme partiality for her son, to the exclusion of her daughters, always displeased him.

"I went in the close carriage," she replied carelessly, "there is only room for two people."

"Then Ferdinand might have gone outside, it would not have hurt him."

Mrs. Fortescue made no reply, but went upstairs, followed by her son.

It was not till dinner that she inquired about the visit to Broome Hall. Florence gave a most graphic account of it, and mentioned the invitations her father had given.

"So they will really come to shoot, papa?" said Ferdinand; "I am so glad. You know you said I might shoot as soon as I was fifteen."

"Go out, Ferdy—not shoot," said his mother anxiously.

"But I must learn to shoot, and old Leicester often lets me fire off his gun."

"But you don't load it?"

"No, but I should soon learn; and I very nearly killed a hare one day—so nearly—"

"Shot at a robin and killed a crow!" said Florence laughing.

"Well, *you* can't do that. I may shoot this year, papa, mayn't I?"

"This year is nearly at an end, Ferdinand. You are not asking for much."

"But you know what I mean, papa. Florence can't shoot, herself, and does not like me to do so," said the boy with an angry glance at his sister.

"Don't look so fierce, you frighten me," said Magdalen. "We are quite content to give all the shooting up to you. We are not ambitious of the honour, I assure you."

"I should not care for shooting only, but if I were a man I should like deer-stalking. It must be a most exciting sport," said Florence.

"Philip Vivian is a capital shot, and a most keen sportsman," said her father. "You must write to the Admiral, Georgy, about their coming; and there is to be an especial invitation to Philip's great dog."

"I will do that, papa," said Florence eagerly. "I will write a card from Muff to Grison. Do ask them to come at Christmas. I like to have people then, and for everything to be different to every-day life."

"It must be that," said Magdalen. "It is so different in itself."

"I know that, in one way, but I want it to be different in another way too. I wish we could give a ball."

"My dear Florence, a ball here! Whom on earth could you ask?" said her mother.

"I don't mean that sort of grand ball; but only the servants and the tenants, and whoever was staying in the house; and we might ask some people—the two Miss Macdonalds—in short, anybody that could dance. We could have it on New Year's Eve, just to dance the old year out. Oh! I should like it so much!—shouldn't you, Magdalen?"

"Yes, I should like a ball, but I don't

care much about New Year's Eve, it's not like Christmas."

"Of course not, but then we should not dance on Christmas Day. I wish people did as much about Christmas as they used to do. I should like to see a boar's head dressed and a wassail bowl, and all the old customs one reads about."

"There was always a boar's head at Iffley Court," said Mrs. Fortescue; "do you remember it, Horace? Old Leonard used to bring it in on an enormous dish. Christmas Day was the only day he came in to wait at dinner. He always dressed it up himself, with holly and evergreen."

"I suppose we can't have a boar's head, mamma; but we can have everything else."

"Everything else in the world but a boar's head," said her father laughing; "I should like to know what that comprises."

"Oh! waits, and carols, church-bells, mince-pies, and Christmas-boxes."

"A wonderful medley! It puts me in mind of the Admiral's writing-table."

"That was a medley! I wish you had seen it, Magdalen. It would have put nurse into positive despair; she is so very fidgety and faddy."

"That's a new word," said Ferdinand.
"Florence has a new word every time I come home."

"It's as old as the hills, Ferdy, only you never heard it. Mamma, we may do something more than usual; I see it by papa's face, and because you say nothing. Now, we have only got to think what we can do."

"First 'catch your hare,' and write your invitations, I should think," said her father.

"Very well; mamma, do ask them for the 23rd. That's the day before Christmas Eve. There will be a great deal to do that

day in decorating the house. Then it will be Christmas Day, and after that there will be snow or skating, or something to be done out of doors besides shooting. We must find something to be done in the house, and wind up with a ball. Oh! it will be delightful!"

The invitations to the Admiral and his nephew were duly despatched and accepted, and several invitations to dinner were sent to the few families who lived within visiting distance. Then Florence and Magdalen sat down to consult who could be found to complete the party in the house.

"The two Miss Macdonalds, of course," said Magdalen, "they are always good-natured and ready to be of use."

"They are very uninteresting, Magdalen. You would not like Mrs. Crawley."

"That clever, ill-natured woman? I could not bear her. I should think she was criticising everything we did."

"Then we can only ask Mr. and Mrs. Latimer. He is amusing."

"And she plays so well."

No one else could be found, and Florence rather reluctantly was obliged to relinquish her idea of collecting a large party together in the house. But the fates were propitious, for the next morning brought a note from the Admiral, to say that his niece, Isabella, Philip's youngest sister, had arrived quite unexpectedly, and that he was obliged, in consequence, to propose to Mrs. Fortescue either to give up their intended visit, or to bring Isabella with them.

"Of course she can come," said Florence decidedly. "I am so glad of another person."

"Then you may continue to be glad," said her father. "It never rains but it pours, for here is a letter from Sir Henry Harcourt, proposing to come on his way from Scotland.

I wish you had not taken this freak of filling the house into your head, Florence."

"Sir Henry Harcourt! Surely he is quite an old man, is he not, Horace?" said Mrs. Fortescue.

"He is much younger than I am, though we were in the same regiment. You must be thinking of his uncle."

"I suppose so ; a very stiff, proud old man. What is the nephew like ?"

"He used to be a very good musician."

"When does he propose to come, Horace?"

"He does not propose any particular day, so I will write and tell him to come when he likes. Will you write to the Admiral and beg him to bring his niece?"

"The plot thickens, does it not, Maggie?" said Florence, as the two girls were sitting in their own room the same day.

"Yes ; but I don't think the last visitor sounds very pleasant."

“The man with the stiff, proud uncle. I don't know why, I daresay he is humble and gentle in proportion. I am so glad Miss Vivian is coming. I wonder if she is like her brother!”

Late in the afternoon of the 23rd, the two girls were summoned downstairs to receive their guests. The Admiral was very eager to introduce his nephew to Mrs. Fortescue and her daughters. His bright, frank manner at once prepossessed them in his favour, and his sudden look of admiration when Florence entered the room, was not without effect. Isabella Vivian, though younger than her brother, was so much older than Florence and Magdalen, that at first they did not feel at all at their ease with her. She was tall and fair, and appeared good-natured and sensible, but without any of her brother's charm of manner.

“I am so much obliged to you, Miss For-

tescue, for inviting Grison," said Philip, as he took Florence into dinner that day. "Of course I could not have brought him without an especial invitation ; and yet I am never quite happy without him."

"We want you to help us to be especially happy this Christmas, Mr. Vivian, so I am very glad you have begun by being pleased."

"I am more than pleased," he said with some emotion, "I am really grateful to you for allowing me to be here. It would be difficult for you to understand the horror I felt of a Christmas at Broome Hall alone with my uncle."

"I thought you had lived with him for some years?" replied Florence looking surprised.

"Yes, abroad, but this is the first Christmas I have spent in England. I had a superstitious dread of it, I think, without any of the old associations, without any of those—in short——" and his voice faltered, "I

could not bear to spend it alone with my own ghosts, and I feel thankful that you have saved me from it."

Sometimes a few words that break through the flimsy web which cover the surface of society, and which make heart speak to heart, create at once a strong bond of union between those who are comparatively strangers. Time and circumstance may sever it, but for the moment they are friends; and such at once were Florence Fortescue and Philip Vivian. They were silent for some moments, for Philip seemed lost in thought, but he suddenly roused himself and said, with his fresh bright smile,

"I am not shewing you much gratitude, I fear; you wished to be made merry, and I have made you look sad."

"No," said Florence; "I am very glad that you like to be here, and very glad that you said what you did. Now I shall have

no scruples about asking you to help us, none, in fact, about making you generally useful."

"I shall be delighted to be useful, but you must teach me how, for I don't think I was ever useful in my life. On the contrary, at home I used to be considered rather helpless, and especially awkward."

"We will teach you," said Florence gaily. "The first thing we want is to decorate the house particularly well, then to arrange some tableaux or charades for next week."

"I will do everything that I am ordered to do, diligently, heartily, honestly and conscientiously, but as to any inventive genius, that, I fear, will be lacking."

Florence did not feel at all sure of it, and, at all events, was delighted to have found so willing a coadjutor; for Ferdinand would never do what he did not like himself, and anything active was not much in Magdalen's line.

The next day Philip was enlisted in Florence's service; and it was really no sinecure, for he had to spend the whole morning at the top of a ladder, twining evergreens round the windows of the hall—over the pictures, between the banisters, in short, in all the parts of the house that had been considered hitherto impossible and inaccessible. However, the result was a very good one, and when the short, dark afternoon closed, as soon as the lamps were lighted Colonel and Mrs. Fortescue were called down to admire their work. Magdalen and Isabella Vivian had devoted their energies to decorating the sitting-rooms, the close companionship it entailed had broken down all shyness between them, so that there was not now the least *gêne* or restraint among the party assembled. All felt as if their acquaintance was of much older standing than a few hours.

“I wish no one else was coming, Magda-

len," said Florence, as they went up to dress for dinner; "we all know each other so well now, anybody else will make it stiff." .

"Do you think so?" returned her sister doubtfully. "There are not people enough for acting tableaux besides the ball."

"That's all for next week. I was thinking of Sir Henry Harcourt; I am sure he is a stiff, tiresome man. Besides, he is nearly as old as papa."

"That is not very old, is it? I daresay he won't come, as he had not arrived at Lexborough when the afternoon train came in."

At that very time Mrs. Fortescue was questioning her husband on the same subject.

"My dear Horace, surely you told me that Sir Henry Harcourt was coming to-day. I sent the carriage to Lexborough, but no one had arrived for us by that train. Tomorrow is Christmas Day; he will hardly come then, will he?"

"I suppose so, if he has missed all the trains. It's not like him, though, to be unpunctual, and he certainly said he should be here to-day. However, he can't come now, and so we need not wait dinner for him, that's one comfort. How happy the old Admiral seems to be here!"

"Everybody is very happy, I think," returned his wife quickly, "especially Florence, who seems to me to have taken forcible possession of Mr. Vivian. I thought he came for shooting, that Ferdy might go out."

"Ferdy always comes first with you, Georgy! We did not mean to shoot this week. By-the-bye, I must see if the boy's gun has arrived."

After dinner, as they were sitting in the drawing room, there was a sound as of tramping feet outside the window.

"What is that?" said Isabella Vivian, looking rather frightened.

"What? I heard nothing. Oh! I guess," said Magdalen.

She rose from her seat, slipped behind the curtain, gently unfastened the shutters and opened the window a very little way. Then the sound of men's voices rose loud and clear in the still night air. They were carol-singers, and the words they sang could be distinctly heard.

"As Joseph was a-walking,
He heard an angel sing,
'This very night shall Christ be born,
The angel's Lord and King.
His birth-place shall be neither
In housen nor in hall,
Nor in the place of Paradise,
But in the oxen's stall.

"He neither shall be clothed
In purple nor in pall;
But in the linen white and fair
That usen babies all.
He neither shall be rock'd
In silver nor in gold,
But in a wooden manger rude
That resteth on the mould.

“He neither shall be washen
With white wine nor with red,
But with the water from the spring
That on you shall be shed.’
As Joseph was a-walking
Thus did an angel sing,
And Mary’s son, at midnight hour,
Was born, to be our King.”

Before it had ended the curtains had been undrawn, and they were all standing by the window to listen. It was a cold, clear night, and a flood of moonlight streamed into the room, outside it lighted up the park, and made the old oak trees stand out clearly against the deep blue sky. It cast broad shadows across the turf, and shimmered on the lake that lay below, still and peaceful, looking like a sheet of molten silver. Even the carol-singers in their rough dark clothes looked picturesque in the moonlight.

There are few hearts that are not stirred by the associations that belong to Christmas,

and the effect of this was enhanced by the still beauty of the night, and the distant sound of the church bells as they were borne at intervals upon the ear.

"I like those quaint old words, I wish they would sing them again," said Philip.

"I have them here," said Magdalen taking up a music-book, and putting it into his hands.

"Thank you. I hope the men are not going away, music in the open air is always so pleasant."

"Shall we ask for it again?" said Florence.
"Enoch Walters will be charmed by the compliment."

"Stay a moment," exclaimed Magdalen.
"Who is that man, papa?"

"One of the singers, I suppose," said her father, carelessly looking out of the window.
"Which man do you mean?"

"That man standing under the tree. He

looks like a gentleman. He is only just come."

"I see him; he can have no business here, shall I tell him to go?" said Ferdinand authoritatively, as he pointed to a man who was standing at some distance from the others. A tall, slight, dark man, with a small head and chiselled features, but so pale, that as the moonlight fell upon his face, it looked almost ghastly.

"Why, it is—it cannot be—by George, it is Harcourt!" exclaimed Colonel Fortescue, crossing the hall, and going out on the lawn.

"Why, my dear fellow, what extraordinary freak is this, coming upon us like a thief in the night? We had quite given you up; come in and warm yourself. Have you been helping our carol-singers?"

"No, I was only waiting for my servant and my luggage, which I left at the Inn," said the new comer in a soft rich voice. "The

beauty of the night tempted me to walk. Then the moon shining on your house, the lights within, the music without, and the church bells in the distance, was a scene of enchantment. I could not help lingering to watch the effect of the moon on those old gables."

"I know it well," said Magdalen, "It always reminds me of the description of Melrose Abbey."

" 'When buttress and buttress alternately
Seems framed of ebon and ivory,' "

said the stranger, turning to her with his peculiarly sad, sweet smile.

"Only for 'buttress' read 'gables,'" said Florence.

"I am glad we have impressed you favourably," said Mrs. Fortescue; "but you have not told us why you appear as a weary wayfarer at this time of night, when commonplace mortals are thinking of bed. Have you dined?"

"Common-place mortals are not supposed to exist on Christmas Eve," he said smiling. "But, in truth, when I found it was so late, I dined at the Inn, strolled down here after, and came in unexpectedly for a concert."

"I am sorry the concert is over," said Philip, as one of the men came up to the window, hat in hand.

"Happy Christmas to your honour, and many of them! Merry Christmas to the young ladies and the young lord, and all the good company!"

"Thank you, my man. You must go round and get some ale, and give them a carol in the kitchen," said Colonel Fortescue.

"Ay, sir, to be sure, sir. Good night, and God bless you!" and the man tramped off to the other side of the house.

"I hope we shall have some more music," said the Admiral. "You will give us some, Miss Florence."

"You have a book of carols, I know," said Philip, turning to Magdalen.

"Yes, but we want men's voices to sing them; trebles alone won't have any effect. Florence, will you sing the second of this, if Mr. Vivian will take tenor?"

"I can't indeed—I wish I could; but as I cannot sing from notes, I should only spoil it."

"Won't you sing it, Harcourt?" said Colonel Fortescue; "I am sure you must sing still. When last we were together, it was your one employment."

"That was long ago, Fortescue. In the 'merry days when we were young.'"

"Oh! that is capital!—as if you were not young now. We were not contemporaries, remember, though we were companions. I am sure you have not left off singing."

"No. I sing occasionally still. If Miss

Fortescue will be very indulgent, I will do my best."

There was no need for indulgence, as Sir Henry Harcourt's voice was a perfect tenor, and his singing that of a most finished artist.

"Will you sing alone now, Sir Henry?" said Magdalen, as she rose from the piano. "I am sure you can accompany yourself."

"What shall I sing? I do not remember anything at all appropriate to Christmas."

"That does not signify," said Florence; "we only sang carols because Mr. Vivian asked for them."

"I remember a song about the old year, if you would like that."

"I think it should be kept for New Year's Eve," said Magdalen.

"But I may not be here then." And after a few rich chords, he played a wild,

dreamy melody to the following words:—

“Pass on, thou old year, and be numbered
To thy fathers, the years that are gone :
Pass on, though still dear in memory
To the hearts thou hast smiled upon.

“And if sorrow perchance in thy footsteps trod
Let no bitter word be spoken,
’Neath the shield of the Christmas babe pass on
In peace, with the hearts thou hast broken.

“Bear out thy burden of withered hopes,
Thy burden of shame and tears ;
Pass on, thou wayward old friend, pass on,
In the van of the coming years.”

There was hushed silence while that exquisite voice was to be heard. Magdalen's eyes were full of tears. She got up and closed the piano.

“We must not have any more singing to-night,” she said.

“That is a bad compliment, Miss Fortescue.”

“You know it is the best I could pay you,” she said quietly.

CHAPTER VII.

Dark and still night, flee hence away,
 And give the honour to this day
 That sees December turned to May.

HERRICK.

How often is our path
 Crossed by some being whose bright spirit sheds
 A passing gladness o'er it, but whose course
 Leads down another current, never more
 To blend with ours ! Yet, far within our souls,
 Amidst the rushing of the busy world,
 Dwells many a secret thought which lingers still
 Around the image !

MRS. HEMANS.

CHRISTMAS DAY dawned bright and clear, exactly what Christmas morning should be ; frosty enough to be exhilarating without making every one look blue, cross, and miserable. It would have been a great innovation if the custom that had existed from their babyhood, of each child having a Christ-

mas-box, had been omitted; so they came down to breakfast full of pleasant anticipations, which Ferdinand's gun, and the two little red morocco cases that were put on the plate of each girl, fully realized. Though the cases were alike, the contents of each were very different. Florence's containing a turquoise and diamond cross, to which a fine gold chain was attached, Magdalen's an opal and diamond locket in the shape of a Holbein jewel.

"I think that is very like you," said Sir Henry Harcourt, as he returned the jewel to Magdalen, after looking at it for some time.

"Like me!" she said amused. "What can you mean?—colourless, perhaps."

"Do you call that colourless?" he said, pointing to the changing colours of the many-tinted opal, as it caught the sunlight. "It only requires a power—the sunlight, to bring

out all its beauty. Some people have hidden depths none suspect till something happens to elicit them."

"I don't know how you feel, Sir Henry," said Philip, "but I feel discontented, and as if I were ill-used and neglected, not to receive a Christmas-box."

"What can we give you?" said Mrs. Fortescue; "I am afraid these bits of holly are all we can offer."

"At all events it is better than nothing," he replied, as he fastened it in his coat.

"Shall I lend you a pin?" said Magdalen to Sir Henry Harcourt, who was in vain trying the same experiment, taking a small gold pin out of her dress.

"Thank you," he said. "Is there not some tradition about berried holly, as it is called?"

"I think so, but I don't remember it."

"Georgy, do you want the carriage to go

to church?" said Colonel Fortescue, as they left the breakfast table. "I think we must walk."

"Oh! mamma, do let us all walk," said Florence. "It is so fine and dry, and not cold."

Mrs. Fortescue agreed, and the whole party walked to the little church in the village, about a quarter of a mile beyond the park gates. As they came back the Admiral offered his arm to Mrs. Fortescue. Ferdinand, as usual, attached himself to his father; Philip and Florence walked together, and Magdalen and Sir Henry Harcourt closed the procession.

It is an undoubted fact that a mysterious sympathy occasionally exists between those who are comparatively strangers, and that sometimes we feel to have more in common with the acquaintance of an hour, than with one who may have been called a friend for years. Perhaps in the latter case we are consci-

ous that all things are viewed by them under a totally different aspect, and that there are subtle influences, which to us are life itself, which for them have no existence. There is a deep repose in the consciousness of this sympathy, a relief from the externalism of daily life,—and this kind of tacit understanding had existed from the first between Sir Henry Harcourt and Magdalen. They talked but little on their way to the house, there seemed so little need for words to express what each felt, intuitively, was in the mind of the other.

Sir Henry was much older than Magdalen, but she was scarcely aware of it. She had a sort of strange feeling, as if he had been always a part of her life. His extreme refinement, together with his very quiet and reticent manner, prevented any feeling of shyness on her part; while to him, with the hackneyed and *blasè* feeling of a man of

the world, the companionship of a young and beautiful girl, totally devoid of either vanity or affectation, who was simply herself, and whose appreciation of beauty and art coincided so much with his own, was irresistibly attractive. Though they were only acquaintances of a few hours, each felt a quiet trust in the other, that reasonably should have been the work of months.

They had been talking of the rambling life Sir Henry had led, and he had been describing his place in Scotland, and his lonely existence there.

"It seems so strange that you and papa should have been abroad together," said Magdalen.

"Very strange, now I see him again, and very strange to feel how my life has stood still."

"I doubt if any life can do that," said Magdalen thoughtfully.

"A life of loneliness must be a stagnant life," he replied somewhat bitterly. "What is never called out ceases to exist."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Affection, home interests, ties of kindred—the necessity of living for others rather than for oneself."

"Then you do not allow that pain spared is equal to pleasure lost? In short, you have no faith in the law of compensation?"

"Have you?" he asked, looking at her in surprise.

"I think so, in the long run; that is, if you take the different parts of any one's life. Besides, people get so accustomed to every idea. I feel that so often with the poor."

"I understand what you mean as far as privation and bodily suffering are concerned, but it cannot be true of mental pain,"

"I think it is. One of the most cheerful people I know is a poor woman blind who is also bed-ridden and crippled by rheumatism. Her daughter, who used to do everything for her, died last year of consumption. Her son has turned out drunken and worthless. Yet I hardly ever heard that woman complain."

"And you think she bears all this simply because she is accustomed to it?"

"Not altogether ; but, as she has not any strong religious feelings, I think it has a great deal to do with it."

"Are you accustomed to analyse human nature in this manner? What has made you such a philosopher, Miss Fortescue?"

"I am not at all philosophical in practice, whatever I may be in theory," she replied, with a smile, of which sadness was the chief characteristic.

By this time they had reached the house.

"We are going to give the old people their dinner now, Sir Henry," said Magdalen. "Will you come?"

"Certainly, if you will allow me. Where do they have it?"

"Here, in the servants' hall; six old men and six old women. It has been a custom from time immemorial, I believe. Papa is very particular about its being kept up."

"At Christmas be merry and thankful withal,
And feast thy poor neighbours, the great and the small."

"Exactly," said Magdalen; "to-day it is the small, and that to me is much the most pleasant."

They followed the rest of the party into a long room with a high roof, and oak tables and benches on each side, perhaps more plentifully than tastefully decorated with evergreens. It was a picturesque old room, with an open roof, which was boarded where the plaster would have been, to

make it warmer. There were some great knobs hanging down from the ceiling, and to the centre one was fastened an old-fashioned brass chandelier, which was only used on state occasions, such as tenants' balls or dinners, and now, at Christmas-time, was elaborately decked with holly and misletoe. The chimney-piece was of stone, which ran up nearly to the roof, and was carved with quaint figures and armorial bearings, and said to have once occupied a more honoured place in the old house.

The women, who were all dressed alike, in scarlet cloaks, and with rather peculiar black silk bonnets, sat on one side, and the men, with blue cloth coats and silver badges, on the other. Florence and Magdalen quickly took off their bonnets, and prepared to carry round the slices of beef which Colonel Fortescue, who had taken his place at the head of the table, was

carving. Sir Henry and Philip Vivian proffered their services, while the Admiral and Mrs. Fortescue and Miss Vivian looked on. It was a pretty sight. The roaring wood fire flickered so cheerily on the oak roof and lit up the shining holly and red berries, casting a red glow upon the two graceful girls, as they waited so kindly, almost respectfully, on the old people. When the dinner was fairly started, they were always left alone to chat and linger over it as long as they liked.

The Fortescues usually dined two hours earlier on Christmas Day, that the household might have time to enjoy the evening. They were very considerate to their dependents. In the afternoon the gentlemen went out for a long walk, and the day having turned cold and raw, the three girls adjourned to the sitting-room.

“Now let us sit and chat comfortably by

the fire," said Florence, giving it a vigorous poke. "I want to talk over so many things, and there has been no time at all."

"I am so glad that I happened to come to my uncle's just now," said Isabella. "It has been so pleasant here, and I am almost more glad for Philip than for myself that he has not been alone at Broome Hall."

"He told me that he was glad not to be there," said Florence. "I was rather surprised."

"Poor Philip!" said Isabella. "Though my uncle is so very, very kind to him, still, it is not like home. Nothing can ever be home again to any of us."

"It is difficult to associate anything like sadness with the Admiral," said Magdalen. "He looks as if he must bring sunshine with him as a part of himself."

"Dear old Uncle William! He has very good spirits generally, but he is especially

happy here. He says no one ever was so charming, Florence, as you are."

"I am very much obliged to him," said Florence blushing, "I was afraid he would think it dull. I wonder what we can do by way of amusement, for the people who are coming next week! There are two large dinner parties of neighbours on Tuesday and Thursday; they will make a capital audience, if we can get up some charades or tableaux with the people that are staying in the house."

"Who are coming to stay here?" asked Isabella.

"Only Mr. and Mrs. Latimer, and the two Miss Macdonalds, not very young, but good-natured and useful, and ready to do all they are asked; but without any inventive genius. Mr. Latimer is clever and amusing. His wife a perfect musician, nothing else."

"That cannot matter. It must be so satisfactory to excel in any one thing," said Magdalen, "that I would relinquish the rest. But we shall have a long evening, Florence. Is there nothing that we can do to-day?"

"Nothing that I can think of, except to make Sir Henry Harcourt sing. What a beautiful voice he has!"

"Yes," said Magdalen. "I hope he will. It will be a real treat. I like so few men's singing."

"Did you ever hear my uncle tell a story?" asked Isabella.

"Never; does he do it well?"

"Yes, and he knows such strange stories. There is one he never likes to tell—a wonderful sort of ghost story."

"Oh! we must hear that; you must make him tell it, Isabella."

"I don't believe he will for me, or even for Philip. He might, Florence, if you beg-

ged him very much ; but I don't know that he would, even then."

"I am glad you suggested it. There is nothing so amusing as a well-told story. I think Sir Henry Harcourt looks as if he knew some."

"There is a story in his face," said Magdalen.

"Don't you remember a book we were reading the other day, saying that some faces do not speak—that they are books in which there is not a line written, save perhaps a date. I think his face has that in it—'a date'—the impress of some one event, or some sorrow that time has never effaced."

"The most interesting story of all would be if every one were obliged to tell his own life," said Florence.

"I am not sure," said Isabella ; "young people would have so little to tell, and there

would be so much that was sad in the history of the old."

A thoughtfulness, if not a sadness, was creeping over the young people with the gathering twilight. Florence and Magdalen were both conscious of a kind of cloud which occasionally seemed to overshadow their lives. They could not define it. It was something mysterious and intangible; something uncertain in their relations with their mother; something which they were conscious had been a part of her life, but which was never alluded to; a sort of phantom which, whenever they lost sight of it, seemed to start up again. Miss Vivian had left the room, but still the sisters sat silently looking into the fire. Florence spoke first.

"Do you ever feel, Magdalen, as if life was a dream,—as if it was difficult to separate the real from the unreal in our lives?"

"Do you mean the past from the present?"

"Not exactly; but as if there was something hidden in our lives; and though common-sense always tells one it is fancy, still the idea remains."

"I don't quite know the sort of idea you mean," said Magdalen, absently.

"I believe that probably you feel exactly the same," said Florence, a little provoked at her sister's impassiveness. "We have often wondered together at the odd things nurse says sometimes; when she shakes her head mysteriously, and talks of 'the time of the trouble.' Now, I want to know what time, and what trouble."

"Yes, I often wonder about that," replied Magdalen, "and why we lived so long at Ifley when we were little children. Grand-mamma has always been so very fond of us—so much fonder than——"

"Than mamma, you mean. I can't understand mamma, Magdalen. She is so odd,

I sometimes think—can't you guess what I mean, I don't like to say?"

"I don't know. Do tell me?"

"It is so difficult to know exactly what pleases her, and sometimes she seems as if she did not care for us at all. I think perhaps that all the time we were with grand-mamma, and when Ferdinand was born, she was not herself—perhaps out of her mind." Florence said the last words in a low whisper.

"Impossible!" said Magdalen, looking quite horrified. "How can you think so?"

"I don't suppose I do, really; it's only when nurse looks so mysterious, and talks of 'the time of the trouble,' and how mamma was so ill abroad. Now, I know when people have fevers their heads are very often affected—that has been the only thing I could imagine." Florence's ideas of illness were very vague.

"I can't think that; but I know that mamma is much fonder of you than she is of me."

"I don't think so—I only see that she is much fonder of Ferdinand than of either of us."

"That is because he is a boy, I suppose."

"Perhaps so, and a very spoilt one too, I think," said Florence, decidedly.

"He is only troublesome if people are cross to him. But I do know what you mean, Florence, about 'an idea.' Sometimes, if something is said, both papa and mamma seem at once on their guard. I don't quite know what is meant by a 'skeleton in the cupboard,' but I do feel that there is something here that must not be talked about. I thought perhaps that there had been more children, and that they had died, and I asked nurse, but she shook her head in her grave way, and said, 'No, my dear,

never, never; it would have been a deal better if they had, a deal better than the trouble that was.' I have no idea what she meant."

"Nor I. But we must dress, Magdalen, if we dine early. It is past dressing time."

Half an hour later the two girls went downstairs together. They were always dressed exactly alike, and to-day the white silk dress and wreath of holly was equally becoming to both.

"Tired, Magdalen?" said her father, looking at the opal locket he had given her in the morning, and which she wore on her neck, for she looked pale, and the conversation she had had with her sister had left an impress of sadness on her countenance.

"No, papa, not at all, and I like my Christmas-box so much. But it is not quite perfect—I want some of your hair and mamma's to put in it."

"If you like ; but I don't think a grizzled lock of hair will be much improvement."

"Will you give me some of yours, mamma?" she said, turning to her mother.

"What for?" she said, carelessly. "I think it does very well as it is."

Magdalen's pale cheek flushed at the cold words and indifferent manner, but she did not reply. Philip Vivian, who was standing by, saw how deeply she was pained, and took some trouble to divert her attention. As he took her in to dinner, she told him what Isabella had said about the Admiral's story, and wished him to ask his uncle to tell it in the evening—but he shook his head.

"He does not like to be questioned about that. It is such a strange story, I don't wonder."

"But that makes me more anxious to hear it. You must ask him, Mr. Vivian, or tell us one as good yourself."

Philip protested he could not do either, and, after dinner, Florence attacked the Admiral himself about it.

For some time he declared that it was quite impossible—that he believed he had forgotten it—that he did not think it right to repeat it—in short, that he would not tell it. But when Florence looked beseechingly into his face, and begged him to do it to please her on Christmas Day, he relented at last, saying that for any one else in the world, or on any other day in the year, he should have persistently refused. For this once he would yield, but he would never—never tell it again as long as he lived.

“You may laugh, Master Philip, if you like,” he said, as he detected a smile on his nephew’s face, “but it’s true, for all that, and you never would have known it, or heard it, if you had not been meddling with what did not belong to you.”

"Now, papa, put your chair close to the fire, and I will put on more wood; and Admiral Vivian must sit in this large armchair, and I will sit on a footstool to make room for everyone," said Florence.

So, after arranging the party to her satisfaction—after two or three sighs, and two or three pinches of snuff, the Admiral began :

"It happened many, many years ago, when I was living in a lonely, out-of-the-way part of the country. I had taken two rooms in a farm-house for fishing, and, though the summer was nearly over, I still lingered on. I came in one evening unusually weary—thought I was tired of the place, and would leave it the next day. I tried to read, but could settle to nothing—gave it up in despair, went to bed, and fell asleep immediately. After a time I woke suddenly, with an impression that some one

was calling me loudly. I listened, but could hear nothing, and, on looking at my watch, found it was only half-past one. Annoyed at my own fancifulness, I turned round, determined to go to sleep again, but it ~~was~~ impossible. The voice I had heard in my sleep still rang in my ears, and, after tossing about restlessly for half an hour, I suddenly rose, and, as if impelled by some irresistible impulse, began to dress,—when the absurdity of my conduct crossed my mind, and, hastily undressing, I returned once more to bed. But this time I did not remain long, for, though wide awake, I heard my own name called distinctly three times. A feeling of awe crept over me, and I resolved no longer to disobey this strange summons. As soon as I was dressed I went downstairs, but all was quiet. I proceeded noiselessly to unbar the door, and went towards the stable. I entered, and, carefully avoiding

any noise, saddled the horse I usually rode. I had determined not to resist the spell which seemed to have been cast upon me, but to see the result of this strange adventure. I led my horse quietly into the high road, and then mounted, leaving the reins on his neck, to see which way he chose, or was impelled to go. It was a bright moonlight night, unusually warm, and I rather enjoyed my nocturnal expedition, and had become considerably excited by the strangeness of my proceeding. My horse trotted briskly forward for about two miles, and then turned up a lane with which I was not acquainted, but which I believed to lead to a village about four miles from the farmhouse. The horse went steadily forward across a common towards some cottages, which were part of the village I expected to see, and stopped at a respectable-looking, old-fashioned stone house, which stood apart

on a small green. There were some gates before the house, at which my horse made a dead pause, and, as I had determined now that nothing should deter me, I opened the gates and rode up to the house. Then I dismounted, and, ascending a few stone steps, rang the bell, which, to my astonishment, was instantly answered. 'Who is there, and what do you want?' asked a man in a hoarse voice, but standing in the shadow of the door, so that I could not see his face. I felt considerably embarrassed as I replied, 'I really do not know, and must ask you to forgive my intrusion at such an hour; I seem to have been led here by some irresistible impulse—why, I know not.' I was still standing on the doorstep, when the man who had before spoken uttered an exclamation of anguish, and threw himself before me on his knees. I then saw that his face was ghastly pale, his eyes bloodshot, and

his whole appearance inexpressibly dreadful. 'God Almighty sent you!' gasped the miserable being before me; 'God in His mercy has sent you to save a guilty wretch from death and hell!' added he, shuddering, and displaying a loaded pistol in his hand. I fancied him a maniac escaped from confinement, but felt no fear, as I said sternly, stretching out my hand for the pistol, 'Wretched man, give it me instantly!' He did so, saying, 'In five minutes it would have been over—in five minutes I should have been a corpse—I should have put an end to a life too painful to endure! I was going away from this house,' he continued, with a look of agony, and lowering his voice to a whisper, 'so that *she* should not hear—it would kill her, you know!' I had been intending to fire off the pistol, so as to ensure the miserable man's safety for the moment, but his last observation deterred

me. 'Promise me,' I said, holding him firmly by the arm, 'swear to me that, as God has shown you this special mercy, you will never repeat this wicked attempt!' 'I promise,' he said; 'but who are you that are come as an angel of mercy between me and my doom?' I hesitated, not knowing how to answer this direct question. He seemed to fancy I was a messenger from heaven, and, fearing that I should lose all influence with him if I acknowledged myself to be only a common-place mortal, I evaded the question, saying, 'I can talk to you of that another time. Tell me when I may come and see you again.' 'I must come to you,' he replied gloomily; 'this is no place for any one to come to. Would to God I had never seen it!' and he appeared relapsing into his former despondency. I tried to rouse him, and to place before him, as kindly as I could, the fearful guilt of his


conduct, and urged him to resist the temptation to despair under which he apparently suffered. I fancied that I had succeeded in making some impression upon him, and as I took leave he wrung my hand, promising to see me again shortly. Though my curiosity had been so much excited, I carefully abstained from endeavouring to dive into the mystery that surrounded him. I waited till he had re-entered the house, and then rode away, marvelling at this strange adventure."

"How wonderful!" said Florence, who had listened in breathless astonishment; "but don't you think it was a dream?"

"It must have been a dream, Admiral," said Colonel Fortescue; "one of those vivid dreams that remain so fixed upon the mind that it seems impossible to throw off their impression."

"I might have thought so," he replied, "but for a tangible proof of the reality of

my nocturnal ride, which I will tell you presently, for I never saw my mysterious friend again. Several days elapsed, and I heard nothing of him, when, becoming impatient, I rode to the scene of my midnight adventure, but I found the house was shut up and untenanted. On inquiry, I was told that a foreign gentleman had been there for a few weeks, but that he had left suddenly, and the house was empty. I was deeply disappointed, and I should have imagined myself under some strange delusion, if I had not unintentionally carried off the unfortunate man's pistol. He had re-entered the house so suddenly, that I had forgotten to return it to him, and was afraid of alarming the inmates by a second intrusion. It was a small pistol, beautifully mounted in silver, and evidently of foreign workmanship. I examined it again and again, almost imagining that, by attentive inspection, I should ob-



tain some clue to its owner; but to this day I have never been able to discover the smallest trace of the family in whom I had become so deeply interested. I can show you the pistol, and you can understand my dislike of discussion and speculation on this strange story; but I have now relinquished all hope that the mystery will ever be cleared."

Everyone was silent and grave. The Admiral was the first to rouse himself, and to try to shake off the impression his story had made.

"Now, I think it is everyone's duty to try and amuse me, Miss Florence. Suppose you tell me a story."

"I would gladly if I could," she replied.

"That story we were reading last week, Florence," suggested Magdalen.

"That is such a different sort of story."

"I think perhaps that would be an im-

provement," said Sir Henry Harcourt; "the one we have heard seems to have made us all very grave."

"I feel as if you must know a good ghost story," returned Florence. "The one the Admiral has told us was true, and so it's not exactly like one."

"But you don't mean that you disbelieve in ghost stories, Florence?" said Isabella Vivian.

"I don't either believe or disbelieve. I think there is no difficulty in thinking such things possible. More wonderful things happen every day, only one never can be sure. I mean I never knew anyone who had seen a ghost. The Admiral's story was a dream."

"Do you think, then, that I look as if I had seen one, Miss Fortescue?" asked Sir Henry, smiling.

"I do," said Magdalen, quickly. "I have

a conviction that you have both seen and can tell us a ghost story."

"I don't plead guilty to the accusation. I do not even remember a ghost story now."

"Surely you know one, Isabella?" said Philip; "you have one written down that Madame de Beaulieu said happened to her when she was a child."

"Yes, I put it into a blank book. I have it here, if anyone will read it aloud."

"I will do that," said Sir Henry—"I can make myself useful as far as that."


Isabella left the room, and in a few minutes returned with a book in her hand, from which Sir Henry read the following story:—

"You know that my youth was spent at Chanteney with my friend, Madame de Lorme—indeed, it was the only home that my brother Hubert and I ever knew, and

we had as happy a childhood as continued kindness and forbearance and sympathy in the pursuits of young people can give. We were all-in-all to each other, for our life certainly could not boast of much society. The only change I remember was when a nephew of Madame de Lorme's paid us a long visit. She had not seen Adolphe since he was a boy, and then she had been both fond and proud of him ; and these feelings again returned towards the handsome young officer, who lost no opportunity of paying her every attention. Yet Hubert and I often remarked that we did not believe Adolphe was really fond of his aunt, and, children as we were, we quickly detected that, beneath an apparently frank and open manner, his nature was essentially worldly and selfish. He was sufficiently good-natured to make us glad to have him as a playfellow, but we never loved him. He seemed in no hurry

to rejoin his regiment, and at last told his aunt that, owing to pecuniary difficulties, he was anxious to retire from the army, and take a small farm in the country. She, with the generosity of her nature, at once proposed to defray his debts, and offered him a home at Chanteney. This doubtless was what Adolphe intended. He gladly accepted her offer, and for a time all went smoothly. But soon his evident selfishness and love of money became too apparent. Madame de Lorme's indignation was aroused, and she resisted any further encroachments. This irritated Adolphe, and at last there was a decided quarrel between them, the particulars of which I never knew, except that it related in some way to his aunt's will. After this he was frequently absent for a long time together, and finally wrote a cold letter to his aunt, saying he could no longer feel happy in her house,

and that he should abide by his original intention, and take a small farm. She was deeply wounded, and never alluded to him again; but her friend and companion, Madame de Lambois, who had lived with her since her widowhood, told me that from that time her health visibly declined. However she never relented, and Adolphe was a sealed subject amongst us. One day, meeting her returning from the chapel, I was struck with the traces of tears on her countenance, a circumstance so unusual that I stopped short and gazed inquiringly into her face, though I did not dare ask the cause of her grief; but she immediately answered my mute appeal by saying gently, 'Adolphe is very ill, Eugenie, I wish you and Hubert to pray for him.' I expressed my sorrow, and promised to do so; but, childlike, it soon faded from my mind, and I forgot even to ask after him again. I have the most vivid



recollection of that cold, dreary spring. The incessant wet weather kept us constantly in the house, and we often spent hours playing in a large hall which in winter was empty, but in summer was generally used as a dining-room. It was shut off from the house door by a heavy curtain at one end, and by a glass-door from the staircase on the other. The windows were so high that we considered it a feat even to scramble up to them, and, when once established there, it was a service of danger to descend. One cold and stormy afternoon, about a week after we had heard of Adolphe's illness, we were sitting in one of the window-seats, watching the dreary rain and listening to the wind as it howled around the old house. It was early in the afternoon, and we were debating as to how it should be spent, when suddenly the curtain at the end of the hall opened, and Adolphe crossed it and passed

through the glass door and up the staircase without observing us,

“ ‘How odd!’ we both said.

“ ‘Mind you stop him, Eugenie, when he comes down,’ said Hubert; ‘he must have one game of play with us.’

“ ‘But won’t he stay?’ I asked.

“ ‘We waited quietly for his return. In a few minutes he again passed through the hall: we called to him loudly, but he did not attend, and we could not catch him, owing to the difficulty of descending from our position. Hubert rushed through the curtain after him, and said, with a face of dismay and astonishment,

“ ‘He is gone!’

“ ‘No! we never heard the door shut,’ I replied.

“ ‘Eugenie, it is locked,’ he said in a whisper, pale and shuddering, but I felt no fear, and hardly understood him. I ran up

quickly to Madame de Lorme's room, and said, 'Adolphe has been here, and he would not come to us.' She said, 'Yes,' in an absent way, and never alluded to his visit. The next morning at breakfast a letter was brought to her, which she had no sooner opened, than, uttering a faint scream, she fell back in her chair insensible. Madame de Lambois hastily took up the letter, which had fallen from her hand. It was a short and formal announcement of Adolphe's death which had taken place the previous day. I never can forget the sickening feeling of terror which took possession of my mind at that moment; and Hubert, who fully shared my dismay, crept round to my side and whispered—

“ ‘Eugenie, you remember the door was locked !’

“It all flashed across me then—the strangeness of his behaviour, his silence,

his quick departure, and I hastily grasped Madame de Lambois' arm.

“ ‘When was it?’ I said.

“ ‘He expired at two o'clock yesterday,’ was the reply.

“It was just the hour we had seen him. Madame de Lorme soon revived, but her spirits never recovered the shock they had received. The circumstance was never alluded to. Even Hubert and I never spoke of it, but years after I found that Madame de Lorme had given Madame de Lambois an account of his interview with her. She was sitting in her room reading, when suddenly Adolphe stood before her. He gazed upon her sadly for a moment, and then said, ‘I am come to beg your pardon, will you forgive me?’ ‘Gladly, Adolphe, I bear no malice,’ was her kind reply. ‘Thank you,’ was his only answer. ‘Won't you shake hands with me, and stay here?’ asked his

aunt rather reproachfully, as he was retreating. She rose and held out her hand, but he shook his head, and glided silently away; and she told Madame de Lambois that she watched him descend the staircase, with the conviction that she should never see him again. Immediately after she learnt from me that he was gone, and when she found the next morning that her mysterious forebodings were realized, the sudden shock was too much for a frame already exhausted by years of lonely suffering. It was the beginning of a long and painful illness from which she never recovered."

"That is a much more real ghost-story, Isabella. Is your friend a fanciful person?"

"Not in the least, and, besides, it happened when she was quite a child, and I don't think children imagine those sort of things."

"Now for your story, Miss Florence,"

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said the Admiral, "your sister said you knew one."

"I couldn't tell it now. It's a different kind of story altogether."

"It is too late for any more stories," interposed Mrs. Fortescue. "Here is Ferdinand fast asleep on the sofa. Go to bed, my boy, or you will be too tired to shoot to-morrow."

"Never fear, mamma," he replied, lighting his candle, with very sleepy eyes and with a very unsteady hand.

"I shall have that story some day, Miss Florence," said the Admiral, "so don't imagine that I am going to be cheated out of it. You fairly robbed me of mine, so some day I shall have my revenge."

"And some day you will show me the pistol," she said, in a low voice, as she wished him good night.

CHAPTER VIII.

That was the first sound in the song of love!
Scarce more than silence is, and yet a sound.
Hands of invisible spirits touch the strings
Of that mysterious instrument the soul,
And play the prelude of our fate. We hear
The voice prophetic, and are not alone.

LONGFELLOW.

THE next day all the gentlemen went out shooting, and the visitors only arrived just before dinner, so that Florence had no time to discuss any of her proposed schemes; but, after breakfast the next morning, she enlisted as many as she could into her service, and carried them off to the library to make a programme for the next day. The two Miss Macdonalds were ready for anything in

the shape of amusement, but Mr. Latimer followed her grumbling.

"What are we to do, Florence?"—He had known her from a child.—"I thought I was come to amuse myself, not to work."

"This is amusement; and if it was work you ought to like it. Don't you know that it is idle and wicked not to work? Besides, you may be as idle, bodily, as you please; we only want your brains, and Mrs. Latimer's voice."

"Well, let us hear what you expect my foggy brains to produce?"

"Some charades and tableaux for us to act to-morrow evening."

"And I may be audience?"

"Yes, and criticise to your heart's content—only help us now."

"Have you any old dresses for acting, Florence?" asked Jessie Macdonald. "Harriet and I can alter them for what is wanted

if we could have them at once. We would work all day."

"How kind of you!" said Magdalen. "Let me help you. We have a cupboard upstairs full of rubbish. We had better rummage in it at once."

"Where is this wonderful performance to take place?" asked Mr. Latimer.

"You are to take trouble to prevent its being 'wonderful,' Mr. Latimer—don't you understand? I thought the L room would be best."

This room was beyond the drawing-room, and but little used, from its odd shape. It was exactly like the shape of an L, and so well adapted for a temporary theatre; the audience being seated in the long, narrow part, and the other being used for green-room and stage, as it had two entrances.

"I see. And who are the actors?"

"Harriet and Jessie Macdonald, Sir Henry

Harcourt, Mr. Vivian, Magdalen, and myself. Mr. and Mrs. Latimer only as they are needed."

"Well, I declare, that is cool! But as Mr. and Mrs. Latimer must not and cannot be needed, it does not matter."

"I shall be of no sort of use to you, Miss Fortescue, I am sure," said Sir Henry.

"Nor I, except in dumb show," said Philip.

"No one must have any thoughts or opinions at all," said Florence; "that is the first thing to establish. Everybody must do exactly as he is told."

"If he can," returned Philip, shrugging his shoulders.

"Have you got all the necessary implements of war?" asked Mr. Latimer.

"Old dresses. Magdalen is gone to look for some."

"Not only dresses, but wigs, rouge, burnt



cork, foot-lights, green baize, large picture-frames, and gauze."

"I daresay we have, or we can get them. But what I want to arrange are the words. The charades must be dumb show, I am afraid, as we have nothing written."

"Certainly not, it would be so very dull. The inspiration always comes at the moment, and as to words, there are so many; let me see: Increase—Counterplot—Blunderbuss—Insolent—Penelope—Mistake."

"What a frightful amount of possibilities! Heaven forefend they should be attempted!" said Sir Henry in a very despairing tone.

"I must be minded, if you please—no one may have either wishes or opinions about anything," said Florence playfully. "Of course we shall only want two or three words for charades, and two or three scenes for tableaux. I have no idea how any of

the words you have mentioned, Mr. Latimer, can be treated. Will you tell us?"

"Easily enough. Take 'Increase'—scene the first, an inn. A sudden arrival, or a mistake, such as Tony 'Lumpkin' sending Miss Hardcastle to his father's house as an inn, by way of a joke. 'Crease,' something about tumbled clothes, perhaps; and the whole can be done by dressing up a head in a bonnet and cloak, and tying it at the top of a long broom, which can be brought in by a man on his knees, he having also a long cloak, and as he rises the figure increases, and may be lifted as high as the ceiling."

"I see," said Florence doubtfully.

"Penelope is rather an effective charade. 'Pen' may be not so easy to manage, but 'elope' makes a capital scene; and then the whole, Penelope and her handmaidens weaving her interminable web, a pretty picture."

"I like that better," said Philip; "you can be a student or scholar, or astrologer—in short, have something to do with a pen, Harcourt; and I am good for an elopement, especially if it may be with that charming old lady I struck up such a violent friendship with yesterday."

"Dear old nurse!" said Magdalen laughing. "Oh! what would she say?"

"Of course she would be enchanted. May I go and propose to her at once, Miss Fortescue?"

"How absurd!" said Florence; "we shall never settle anything if no one will talk seriously."

"Counterplot is a good word," said Mrs. Latimer. 'Counter' must be a scene in a shop; you would do that very well, Mr. Vivian, I am sure; and then for 'plot,' Sir Henry Harcourt would be a capital spy, or traitor, or Guy Fawkes. I forget how we

acted the whole. Mr. Latimer, do you remember?"

"It does not strike me as very complimentary, Mrs. Latimer," said Philip, "that my type is exactly that of a shopman."

"Or mine that of a spy or traitor."

"Now you have got yourself into a scrape, Mary," said Mr. Latimer to his wife. "You must get out of it as you can. I shall suggest music, a cat, a steampacket—and you for the whole."

"You would be perfect for the whole," said Magdalen gently, for she saw Mrs. Latimer looked shy and distressed.

"We can't waste Mrs. Latimer upon that," said Florence; "we want her between the scenes, to sing one of her beautiful songs, to prevent the audience becoming impatient."

After considerable discussion, some words at last were found, upon which all were

agreed. Mr. Latimer declared that he would have nothing to do with arranging the tableaux, unless they could manage to have dress rehearsals.

"It is simply impossible," he said. "The whole thing depends upon the management of the light. You can come down to dinner to-day in your dresses."

"But we must know how to dress, and what to dress for," said both the Macdonalds in a breath.

"Well, I will tell you. Let us try the 'Rape of the Lock.' Florence will do very well for Belinda, with her hair drawn back over a cushion, and a sacque. Not fair enough, perhaps, but that can't be helped. Philip will do as Sir Plume, and you two for the other ladies. Then, for the second, let us have the execution of Mary Queen of Scots. Miss Vivian and you two must be the three Maries, and Magdalen, in black

velvet and pearls, will be a capital Queen—looks the character exactly,” he said, screwing up his eyes and looking at her through his eye-glass, “a mixture of sadness, dignity, and resignation—I wonder it never struck me before !”

“I hope your words are not a prophecy,” said Magdalen, blushing. “I feel very unlike either a martyr or a heroine. I should not like to be put to the test.”

“You must be headsman, Harcourt—you will look it very well.”

“Thank you—it is satisfactory to know what one does look like. Spy, traitor, and executioner ! I object to the last decidedly.”

“It will do very well, and make a very effective tableau,” continued Mr. Latimer, without listening, and still looking at Magdalen through his glass. “Mind you get yourself up well, Magdalen—in black, with Marie Stuart’s head-dress and all that sort

of thing. The others can be dressed at the time. We shall only want lace ruffles and a periwig for Sir Plume, and black clothes and a hatchet for the executioner." Mr. Latimer had talked himself into a state of great interest, as Florence expected he would, if he once took up the idea. The two girls took considerable pains with their dress, so as to meet his approval, and the result was most successful.

Florence's naturally brilliant complexion, softened by the powder, made a very perfect Belinda. Her dress, too, was admirable, a large-patterned old-fashioned chintz, open in front, over a white silk petticoat, and looped up with scarlet satin bows. High-heeled shoes; her hair drawn off her face over a cushion, and the two long locks hanging down behind. But, bright and effective as her appearance was, it was far exceeded by Magdalen's loveliness as Mary

Queen of Scots. Her dress and *coiffure* exactly suited her pale complexion and dark hair, and the sad expression of her soft brown eyes made her seem a living representation of the unhappy Queen.

"My stars!" exclaimed Ferdinand, stopping short in surprise, as he came into their room. "Well, you have been and gone and done it!"

"Do you think we have dressed ourselves up very fine, Ferdinand?" said Florence, with a pleased consciousness that her endeavours had been successful.

"You are very smart—very fine, but Magdalen is beautiful—beautiful!" said the boy, looking at her with undisguised admiration.

"Will you let me take you to dinner, as I am to be your destroyer after," said Sir Henry Harcourt, offering his arm to Magdalen.

Magdalen took it silently, but her heart throbbed with a sudden feeling of pain. The first moment that she saw him, when he was standing alone in the cold moonlight, she was conscious of an indefinable attraction towards him. The intercourse of even a few days had deepened this feeling, and she now knew, with mingled shame and pain, that life would lose one great charm for her when he was gone. Yet, probably, his path "led down another current," and his interest in her—for she felt intuitively that he had a deep interest in her—but the fancy of a moment. She never speculated as to any result, but only wished that life would never change. "*Le jour la journée*" with his presence was sufficient for her. There was a thoughtfulness about him, a depth and earnestness in his conversation, that seemed to fill up a void in her life. She wondered how it was that she had lived so

long without the quiet intelligence and the ready sympathy that seemed becoming a necessity to her. His quiet reticence, too, excited her curiosity. She knew—for the instincts of affection are generally true—that he had some sorrow in his life, some deep, underlying grief, and saw with gladness that her society never jarred even upon his saddest mood. She felt, with Madame de Genlis, when she says, “*Avec quel tremblement on parle à un homme vraiment malheureux. Comme on a peur de ne pas diviner ce qu’il faut lui dire, et de toucher maladroitement à un cœur déchiré.*” In every conversation she had felt instinctively that she might unintentionally open wounds which, even if healed by time, had left deep scars. She often remembered her own words, that his face had “a story in it,” or “perhaps a date.”

“I hope not,” she said, as she took his



arm. "Mrs. Latimer has been prophesying evil for me to-day, and now it is to be fulfilled through you."

"Never," he said in a low voice. "No evil should ever cross your path if I could prevent it."

Magdalen's eyes fell beneath the passionate earnestness of his manner.

"Did it ever strike you," she said, "how very little influence we have over the destinies of others—how little power to avert sorrow or suffering from those we love best? Everyone's life seems so entirely the result of circumstances."

"Philosophising again," he said with a smile; "but now there is too much fatalism in your theory for it to be a sound one."

"Surely you agree with me?"

"Only as far as regards others. No human being ought to have power over the destiny of another. But for ourselves I think we

shape our own life, and suffer for our own misdoings. Our free-will is entire and unlimited."

" ' Our acts, our angels are, for good or ill,
The fatal shadows that surround us still, ' "

said Magdalen; "but fancy talking philosophy or metaphysics in a masquerade dress!"

"We live in one," he returned, so seriously, that Magdalen felt startled, and as though she had been treading on forbidden ground, and the subject was dropped.

The charades and the tableaux were eminently successful, and all the few remaining evenings were devoted to music and acting. The days passed far too quickly, and all were sorry when New Year's Eve arrived, which was to be the day of the tenants' ball, after which the party was to disperse.

Philip Vivian had announced his intention of opening the ball with Mrs. Cooper—the

Admiral had already claimed Florence. Sir Henry Harcourt went up to Magdalen, as a matter of course, but she hesitated.

"I suppose we ought not to dance together to-night," she said, "we generally try to mix with the servants and tenants as much as possible. You had better dance with the housekeeper, as Mr. Vivian has chosen old Nurse."

"If I do as you wish, and dance with some one else, will you find some time that I may talk to you? I go to-morrow."

"Really?" she replied, looking up into his face, and showing by her change of countenance how unwelcome the intelligence was to her.

"I will dance two of those interminable country dances, and then I will come and look for you."

Magdalen agreed, and he found her sitting a little apart, evidently expecting him.

She took his arm silently, and they walked together to one of the large oriel windows, and stood for a minute silently looking out upon the dark blue sky studded with myriads of stars.

"It is like the night you came," she said at length.

"Yes; but how unlike! How different life is to me in only one short week! What is that?" he said, as the music suddenly ceased. Nothing was heard for a moment, and then the great stable clock chimed the knell of the old year. Every clang seemed to vibrate through Magdalen's heart; and as the last stroke died away, and the band struck up "God save the Queen," she hid her face in her hands to hide the tears that her overwrought feelings wrung from her. "A happy, very happy new year to you," he said, taking Magdalen's hand, and pressing it warmly.

"The same to you," she said, smiling through her tears.

"That depends upon you," he replied quickly. "May I come here again?"

"You know you may," she said, giving him her hand.


He turned very pale, and his lip quivered, but he did not speak. He only offered her his arm, and took her back to the ball-room. When Magdalen came down to breakfast the next morning he was gone.

CHAPTER IX.

O death, death, death, thou ever-floating cloud,
There are enough unhappy on this earth,
Pass by the happy souls that love to live ;
I pray thee pass before my light of life,
And shadow all my soul that I may die.
Thou weighest heavy on the heart within,
Weigh heavy on my eyelids : let me die.

TENNYSON.

THE eighteen years that have elapsed since we last saw Mrs. Clements in — Row, have produced as great a change in her as in any of the family at Waverton Hall. She is now an aged woman, aged beyond her years, and for some time past has lodged in a farm-house close to the village of Waverton—a silent, careworn woman, with no friends and scarcely any acquaintances. No one knew why she had



been so anxious to secure the two small rooms that Farmer Millard occasionally let ; no one knew why she lived there, or what had been her calling ; but, as she appeared respectable, did not give much trouble, and paid her rent regularly, no one cared much about her ; and, after a few speculations, all curiosity ceased. The old age and respectability, the cessation from toil, to which she had been looking forward all her weary life, and to attain which had been the incentive which led her to work early and late, had come at last. To enjoy it she had brought a heart full of anxiety, a conscience burdened with remorse. She was, as she said herself, a lone woman. The sad, dying eyes of her daughter—for Mildred had been dead some years—continually haunted her, and occasionally she would have given worlds for compulsory work, for anything which would of necessity distract her mind from the one

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thought over which she brooded night and day. Oh! what madness had led her to commit this crime?—why had she, by hard words and reproaches, broken Mildred's heart?—why had she robbed herself of what would have been the solace of her old age?—something to love—a child to cherish. If she had only known that her sister Rebecca would die and leave her all her hard-won savings! But how could she foretell it?—surely her fate was a hard one; and then the dreary, careworn face looked still older and more grief-stricken, and she would wring her hands and walk up and down the room in an agony of remorse. To the world she only appeared a silent, sorrowful woman; but the dread of detection still poisoned her life, for she did not know what might be the penalty of the crime she had committed. She had never promised Mildred to confess what she had done.

Oh! no, Mildred could never even wish that—but only not to lose sight of her grandchild; and it was to fulfil this promise that she had given up her London home, had first lived at Lexborough, and had now come to Waverton, so as to be able occasionally to see the child towards whom her heart often yearned. She had never heard of the sorrow and perplexity which the advent of the two babies had caused, and never doubted that Colonel and Mrs. Fortescue's youngest daughter was her grandchild.

For a few weeks after leaving the baby at Parkhurst Lodge, the relief of getting rid of it was so great, that even the fear of detection scarcely oppressed her; but when it became necessary to tell Mildred that the child was dead, she shrank from the task, and delayed it as long as possible. At last she wrote to her sister, saying that for some time the child had been sickly and pining,

and that one night it was suddenly seized with convulsions, and expired in a few hours, begging her to break the news to her daughter. She also said that she could not write at first, for she had been so worn out with nursing the child, that she had had a bad illness, and that in consequence it had been buried by the parish. She said this, feeling sure that Mildred would ask to be taken to the child's grave.

Contrary to her mother's expectations, however, Mildred did not write, but her sister told her that she did not think "Mildred seemed fretting about the child's death, or it might be that she was so poorly, that she did not take much heed of anything." This was quite true, for Mildred's health was rapidly failing, and, as she felt that her own death-warrant was signed, and her life ebbing away, the thought of rejoining her baby was her great source of consolation.

By degrees she grew so weak, that she was obliged to give up her place, and told her mother that she must come home again. This greatly flurried Mrs. Clements, who dreaded seeing her, feeling as if Mildred's quick, natural instincts would find out that something was wrong. She determined to tell her that the baby died at Hampstead, but she had no opportunity of doing so before she arrived, for, without any warning, Mrs. Clements found her one evening, when she came home, sitting quietly by the fire.

"Mother," she said, with flushed cheeks and panting breath, "I'm come home to die. You will give me shelter till I do, won't you?"

"Oh! Mildred, how you startled me! Why ever didn't you write and say you were coming? It gave me such a turn! You look pretty well—only, to be sure, you seem rather thin and short-breathed."


But her mother was not really deceived as to her state of health; she had seen too much illness not to be aware at once that Mildred was in an advanced stage of consumption.

"I don't know how I seem, mother, but I am dying, and going to my baby," she said, looking round the room, as if she expected to see something to remind her of the child.

"Ah! poor lamb, I feared it would be hard for you to come back here. But she did not suffer, and, after all, 'twas a good thing the Lord saw fit to take her early."

Something forced and nervous in her mother's manner made Mildred look up quickly, and a sudden feeling of distrust sprang up in her mind.

"She didn't want for anything, mother, did she? I sent you the first ten shillings I got."



"To be sure she didn't. I am not one for stinting anybody, much less a baby." But, though Mrs. Clements' answer was plausible and ready, her daughter was not satisfied; there was something in her mother's manner so unlike the hard, matter-of-fact woman she had always known. "I'll get you some tea, Mildred, and then you had better go to bed. I'll call at the dispensary and get some stuff for your cough to-morrow."

"It's not worth while, mother; but I'm weary to death—I should be glad to go to bed."

Mildred's decline was gradual. Her mother nursed her anxiously, with a hope that she would live till she could in some way repair the wrong she had done her; but she never mentioned her child, and Mrs. Clements feared that there was some distrust in her mind about it.

The fact was that one day, while she was out, a neighbour had come in to see Mildred, and, after some common-place consolations about the child, said,

"If the baby had been here, and your mother had called me, I feel pretty sure that I could have saved it. A hot bath, and some stuff as I've got, has brought our little Harry round times, and he was a much weaklier child than yours. You see, I never heard as it was ailing till after the funeral."

"But wasn't she here?" asked Mildred, in an agitated voice.

"Surely no—up at Hampstead with your aunt. Didn't your mother tell you?"

"Then was she buried at Hampstead?" inquired Mildred, eagerly.

"I suppose so, but I never heard anything of it."

"It was there that mother was so ill, I suppose?" said Mildred.

"Was she? I never knew of that either. Things do happen, and one don't know much about 'em," Mrs. Ford replied, thinking it all very odd, and detecting a very disturbed look on Mildred's face.

She asked Mrs. Ford one or two more questions, but could not obtain any definite information from her. She did not feel sure whether the woman was on her guard, or if the ignorance she professed was genuine. At all events, she left Mildred to ponder over what she had heard in a state of great perplexity. Mildred brooded over this for some time. One day she said,

"Mother, I want to go to Hampstead—will you go with me?"

Mrs. Clements' heart stopped beating; but she rallied, and answered quickly,

"Law, child, whatever should you go there for? You are not strong enough for a tramp like that. Is it to see your aunt?"

"I should like to see her, mother."

"I daresay she would come here. I'll send a message on Sunday." Mrs. Clements promised herself, as she said this, that no message of the kind should ever be delivered.

"I did not mean to walk," said Mildred, sadly. "I couldn't do that—and it's not only on account of aunt. I must see my baby's grave, mother."

"Then it's no good to go there for that, for the child was buried here by the parish, through my being so ill; and who is to find a baby's grave in a crowded place like the burial-ground of St. Cuthbert's? I know nothing about it myself."

"Then you brought her here from Hampstead to be buried, mother?" said Mildred, very slowly and distinctly, and fixing her eyes upon her mother's face as she spoke. "Why did you? I should have liked it better there."

"Why did I?—and why didn't I?—and you would have liked something else better? I take it very hard, Mildred, that after all I've done—and that the best I could—that you should be taking me to task this way—very unaccountable indeed, and, what's more, I'm not going to stand it."

Mrs. Clements had worked herself up into a fit of anger, partly real, from the annoyance her daughter's words gave her, but more from a wish to dismiss the subject. She was flouncing out of the room, when Mildred called to her to "stop a minute longer, as she had something to say." Very reluctantly Mrs. Clements came back.

"I want to tell you why, mother. It's because Mrs. Ford never knew as baby was ailing—never knew as you'd been so ill. You don't seem willing to talk to me about her, but it's all so strange that, while I can, and it won't be long as I can, I expect, I

should like to talk to my aunt about her."

"Talk away, then, as much as you like," said her mother, now really angry, "only don't talk to me, for I want to hear none of it. I've had trouble enough as it is, from the school."

"I am sorry," said Mildred quietly; "I shall trouble you much longer, mother."

Then Mildred hastily left the room, bang-
ing the door after her, and leaving Mildred
alone with her worries. The more she
thought of the matter, the more convinced she
was that there was some mystery attached
to the case. She had a longing to
know what was the matter there she had
heard of, but she knew that she was
not to go. She was
tired and weary and
the
of the
to her.

The distrust and uncertainty with which Mrs. Ford's words and her mother's manner had inspired her, made her restless and unhappy, and this soon told upon a frame already worn out by sorrow and suffering. A succession of sleepless nights soon exhausted her small remaining stock of strength. She grew rapidly weaker, and now seldom left her bed.

"Are you awake mother?" she said one night, after being silent for hours, watching the last few embers die out of the grate, and the flicker of the gas lamp upon the window.

"Yes. Is it a drink you want?" said Mrs. Clements, preparing to rise. She nursed Mildred well and tenderly.

"I don't mind for that now, mother. I'm wondering if you got my baby named as you said you would?"

"Yes, surely I did ; an odd, out-of-the-

way name, too, and so the minister seemed to think."

"Henrietta," said Mildred with a sigh that was almost a sob. "It was my lady's name."

"Yes, that was it, sure enough."

"I wanted to ask you about that, and whether, when I die, I can be laid beside my baby?"

"I will do what I can as far as I know ; but you mustn't mope and fret like this—it's not giving yourself a chance."

"That's nonsense, mother ; what chance have I now?—chance of life, I mean. God knows that for the rest I have suffered enough, and mourned long and bitterly, if He will only please to pardon me when I die, and let me see my child again ! I've got nothing to live for now. Something tells me," she continued excitedly, "that the end is coming—that I shan't be here

long, and there are some things I want to speak about. I've been a great trouble to you, mother—say you forgive me?”

“Don't talk like that, child—I can't bear it,” replied Mrs. Clements, crying bitterly.

“There's a deal more the other way, for I've been hard to you times.”

“I've always been a trouble, and no good to you, mother,” persisted Mildred, “and so hard as you had to work always! My head got turned as a girl. I see it all as I lie here—all the times in my life come before me one by one. Sometimes I think it might have been the same thing with baby, and so she is far better where she is. She might have had a pretty face, and listened to all people told her. There's only one thing you can do for me now, and that is,”—and here her words came slowly and with a gasp—“I should like *him* to know how it is, and how we are both gone. Not

to trouble over it—I don't want that—but to know that I bear no ill-will towards him for his neglect. He was not heartless, as you think, mother. I wish I could tell you all, but it is his secret as well as mine. He never thought as I might want; he was hurried off, without having time to think for me, but he's never forgot—I feel sure of that—and, if baby had lived, he would have cared for his child. It is better, perhaps, as it is. He will marry, and if he ever thinks of me, it will not be with any unkind feeling in his heart. I see now what I never saw before, and I am glad that, as baby is gone, I shall be out of his way too. Only promise to let him know that we are both gone, mother?"

What Mildred had said about the child's father made a strong impression upon Mrs. Clements, and she hesitated before she answered.

"You will do this for me, mother, won't you?"

"How can I? I shall never see him—I don't know where he is—in foreign parts, you told me."

"But Aunt Rebecca would find out and tell you. The families are acquainted, I know. Perhaps, if you would write it down for me, mother, the letter had better come from me, and you could send it after I was gone."

This last proposal fairly staggered Mrs. Clements. She had acted a lie, spoken a lie, and now she was about to burthen her conscience still more by writing a lie. She shrank from doing this. Besides, if she did so, there would be her own writing, telling against her for ever and ever. She felt she could not do it. Would it not be better to tell all?—to confess what she had done to Mildred while she could still have the com-

fort of hearing words of forgiveness from her lips? How could she let her carry a lie with her into her grave? It might be a comfort to her to know that the child was well cared for, and that she was being brought up like a lady; for Mrs. Clements knew that Lady Lennox had taken both children away with her to Iffley Court, while Colonel and Mrs. Fortescue were abroad. She must think it over—she must have time to consider. But she would never write that letter—never!—she determined that.

She pondered over the possibility of confessing to Mildred what she had done, till at last the idea became comparatively easy to her; and by degrees it took the form of a fixed resolution not to let her daughter die without receiving her forgiveness for the past and injunctions for the future. She had not courage to broach the subject, and

waited anxiously for some opportunity of doing so. She hoped that Mildred would say something more about the letter, then she would tell her all. She had not long to wait, for the first day Mildred was able to sit up for a few hours she asked for a pencil and paper.

"You'd better have a book, Mildred—writing will be so tiring for you."

"No, mother, I must do this while I can. I will only just put down what I want you to say for me."

Mrs. Clements stood still in the middle of the room with the shawl in her hand that she was about to wrap round her daughter, as motionless as if suddenly struck with catalepsy. Suddenly she moved forward, and throwing herself on her knees, said, in a hard, unnatural voice, as if the words were being dragged from her quite against her will,

"I can't write, don't ask me! The child is not dead; but well and thriving, as far as I know. Mildred—say you forgive me."

But no sound came from Mildred's lips, she closed her eyes and turned deadly pale. Her mother thought she had fainted, and supported her in her arms. After a minute she opened her eyes.

"Not dead?" she said faintly. "Oh! mother, what can you mean?"

"It's true, indeed it is. Let me tell you how it was, Mildred. Let me make a clean breast of it while I can."

She then related her visit to Hampstead; how, when the other baby was in her arms, the idea of carrying it off, for the sake of the reward, took possession of her; then her difficulty about telling the police, and finally her leaving both children at Parkhurst Lodge.

"And they have taken our child to bring

up with their own, rearing and treating her like a lady, so she'll never want. It's best for her, Mildred—I did it for the best; only let me hear you say once that you forgive me."

"I can't say so; it's very, very hard! How do I know this is all true, mother? If my baby's alive let me see her. To think as she's living and kept away from me! Oh! I can't bear it! Why did you tell me? I'd rather she was dead—I was glad she was dead,—and all these weeks you've deceived me!" And Mildred turned away with a bitter rankling feeling of injury in her heart.

"I know I have," said Mrs. Clements crying bitterly; "but what could I do? If I'd told you, and you had informed against me, I'd have been in prison now; and what would you have done? I never thought to harm the child. Oh! Mildred, say once you forgive me."

"I do forgive you," said Mildred coldly ;
"but I am not glad to die, as I was before.
I leave my baby behind, and I can't tell
him she is dead. I can't see her myself. I
do not know what to do. It's been a cruel
—cruel wrong, mother; more cruel than you
can tell."

Mrs. Clements had strung herself up to
make this confession to her daughter, but
now that it was over, and she had no longer
the motive for restraint that having such
a secret to keep had been, but only Mil-
dred's averted looks to bear, she utterly
broke down and her grief was overwhelm-
ing.

"I want to see my baby, mother," said
Mildred almost angrily ; "she's mine, and
I've a right to see her."

"But how can I get her," said Mrs. Cle-
ments, in great distress, "and she miles
away in ——shire?—and who would believe

what I said, and where should I be if all this this were proved against me? Oh! Mildred, surely you would never bring her back to poverty and want again!"

Mildred was silent; she felt it right to consider what was best for the child. She saw the difficulties that surrounded the establishment of her claim to it; and if she did succeed, what would the child's life be? No, she must overcome her own selfish longing, for the baby's good.

"I suppose it must be as it is," she said, sadly. "Only promise me one thing, mother; and that is, never to lose sight of her, to watch over her while you live, till he comes back; and, if anything in life goes against her, tell him—tell her father—say it was my dying wish, and that I trusted in him to see her righted."

"I will—indeed I will," said Mrs. Clements.

"Swear it," said Mildred passionately, "else you may break your promise, and then I feel I'd never rest in my grave."

"I do swear it, Mildred, so help me God!"

Then there was silence. A long, long silence between the two women. At last Mildred said,

"Lay me down, mother; I'm very cold, very tired. I was angry at first, but anger does not do for one as I am now. I do forgive you, and others who have been hard upon me, for I do not wonder at them now; only be sure to tell him all you've told me. If my child ever knows about me, don't let her hate me because I gave her up."

These were almost the last words Mildred Clements ever spoke, for the excitement she had undergone produced a sharp attack of fever and consequent exhaustion. In less than a week she was dead. Her mother

cut off all her hair—the beautiful rippled golden hair, of which she had been so proud—and put it carefully away. Then, in a momentary feeling of compunction and remorse she took off the wedding-ring which she found hung round Mildred's neck, and put it on her finger. Day and night she sat by the bedside, gazing on that pale but exquisitely lovely face. Those few days added years to her life, and when the grave claimed her daughter, and she sat down once more by her desolate hearth, she became the aged, stricken woman we have described in the beginning of this chapter.

Mrs. Clements fully intended to fulfil Mildred's dying injunctions, and not to lose sight of her baby; but, practically, it was almost impossible for her to do so. She knew that Lady Lennox had taken both the children with her to Iffley Court, and that Colonel and Mrs. Fortescue had gone abroad; but

she had no means or opportunity of making any further inquiries about the child, no money to spend in travelling, or to enable her to give up her daily work. So she remained in London, working hard, and almost glad of the necessity for doing so, in order to drown thought. But when her sister Rebecca died, leaving Mrs. Clements all her savings, which were considerable, she felt she could then fulfil her promise to obtain some definite information about the child, towards whom her own heart had often yearned.

As soon as she could dispose of her house and furniture, she went to live in the nearest town to Iffley Court. But the information she received was very unsatisfactory. The children had been removed to Colonel Fortescue's place in the north, and had not been to see their grandmother for some time. "Sweet little girls" they were when they

left, said the woman at the Lodge, with whom Mrs. Clements had made acquaintance, so as to be able to learn as much as possible about them, "though Miss Magdalen used to look sickly at times."

"That's a curious name," replied Mrs. Clements. "Is she the eldest?"

"No, Miss Florence is the eldest—Miss Fortescue that is; but they must be grown out of all recollection now. There's a son, too, a fine boy, born while Mrs. Fortescue was abroad."

Finding it useless to remain near Iffley Court, and having learnt the name of the place to which the Fortescues had removed, Mrs. Clements went to Lexborough, and took a lodging there; but it was too far off for her project, so, after living there for a year, she removed to Waverton and took lodgings in a farm-house in the village.

CHAPTER X.

Love alone the spell hath given
Unto the green of earth, the blue of heaven !
It is the law of all ; few men can think
Save in another's heart ; yea, few can drink
Of their own fountains but in other's eyes,
When they can see themselves reflected there
With an ideal beauty.

FABER.

THE first moment that Magdalen was aware that Sir Henry was really gone, it was almost a relief to her. Her mind was so bewildered, and her feelings such a strange mixture of sorrow and joy, that she longed to be alone, to question her own heart, and to revel in the consciousness of being loved. For she never for a moment doubted that he did love her ; and the fact of his sudden departure did not at all militate

against this conviction. "He will come again soon," she said to herself over and over again; "and then—" There was too much tumult in her heart now for her to speculate upon the future. When the first agitation was over, then "the sober certainty of waking bliss" would be sufficient to support her under the blank of his absence.

She wished very much that the rest of the party were gone. Most of them did take their departure the same day; but Colonel Fortescue persuaded Admiral Vivian and his nephew and niece "to let them down easy," as he called it, and to remain a day or two longer. So, as Philip was as usual devoted to Florence, Magdalen had Isabella Vivian still on her hands. Everyone was surprised to find Sir Henry gone, and during breakfast there was some discussion about him. It was strange to Magdalen to sit by and hear all the remarks that were made

upon one who seemed so exclusively her own property ; and yet there was happiness even in hearing his name. The Vivians did not stay long, for being such near neighbours, many places for frequent meetings were arranged. Ferdinand was to go back to school the next week, and then the old house returned to its accustomed quiet. "Stagnation," Florence called it, as she watched the carriage drive away.

"And leave the world to dulness and to me," she exclaimed. "Magdalen, you don't look half sorry enough that this pleasant time is over. I can't make you out. You have been in a dream for days—ever since Sir Henry Harcourt left us, in fact," she added, mischievously.

Magdalen blushed. She had never mentioned his last words to anyone, though she had had grave doubts as to whether it was not her duty to tell her mother what he had

said ; but there was too little confidence between them for her to do so without a greater effort than she felt able to make. Besides, Sir Henry had only said that he wished to come again, and till he did so it seemed better for her to keep what might possibly be only her own impressions to herself. So she did not even say anything to her sister about him, but only replied, in answer to Florence's remark,

"Surely the best part of a pleasant time is its memory. I think that is better than the time itself, for then we have our happiness safe. Nothing can undo what is past."

"I daresay ; but all that is so wise and so like you, Magdalen. You are always ready to drop back into the old groove. Now I shall be unsettled for a week, I am sure."

Magdalen thought that in reality she was probably much more unsettled than her sis-

ter, and thought so more and more every morning when the post came in, and she was conscious of a breathless feeling of anxiety till she knew whether there was a letter from Sir Henry Harcourt to her father. Almost to her surprise she heard nothing of him, till sometimes all that had happened seemed like a dream.

"Oh! Magdalen," said Florence, rushing into their sitting-room one morning, with a face full of agitation, "such an odd thing has happened—I mean I have heard something so strange!"

"What?" inquired her sister, looking up eagerly; "anything about me?"

"Yes, partly about you. What made you guess? It has to do with the old thing," she continued, lowering her voice—"with the mystery that we cannot understand. But I was not meant to hear it, so I don't like to tell you."

"Do tell me quickly," said Magdalen, her curiosity now fully awakened.

"Well, you know that I lost my scissors, and when I was looking for them I remembered that Mrs. Latimer wanted some fine scissors to trim a wig, or whiskers, or something, and that Isabella fetched mine, so I went down into the L room to look. The door was open into the drawing-room, and while I was looking papa came in, and asked mamma, who was writing there, to read a letter."

"Who from?" asked Magdalen eagerly.

"Oh! I don't know; some house-agent, I think—I did not hear that. It was when our names were said that I could not help hearing. One always does catch one's own name," said Florence apologetically, thinking that Magdalen began to look shocked.

"Well, but what did you hear?"

"The first thing was mamma saying, 'I

did not mean Florence to come out this year.' Then papa said, 'Very well, I don't wish it. Heaven knows London would bore me to death; only, if we are to go there, this house would suit us exactly—and I must send an answer to-day, one way or the other.' 'I could only present Florence, I suppose,' mamma said, 'as she is eighteen.' Then papa said rather crossly, 'I am not going to hear anything about that old story, Georgy. People won't ask their ages, and we know there cannot really be any difference between them.' 'It is not only their ages,' mamma said. Then papa spoke very gravely indeed, as he does sometimes when mamma spoils Ferdy and snubs us: 'Whatever one does, the other does; never forget, Georgy, that we may be wrong, after all. Now, Magdalen, what can it mean?'

"I suppose we are twins, then. We

must be if there is no difference in our ages."

"Is it not very extraordinary? How I wish I knew!" said Florence.

"I think I should ask," said Magdalen thoughtfully.

"And let mamma know that I was listening!" said Florence. "She would think I was doing it on purpose. I never could."

"Do you know what was settled at last?" asked Magdalen.

"I am not sure. I think that it would do just as well next year. I don't want to go to London at all—do you?"

"I think I should like it," said Magdalen quietly.

"Should you?" said Florence, looking at her in surprise.

"I fancy so, but I don't know."

Magdalen thought that she should then be sure of meeting Sir Henry Harcourt. But this did not occur to Florence, who

spent the rest of the day in speculating over the mystery that her mother's words implied. They both felt very guilty when the subject of going to London was discussed before them at dinner.

"Your mother and I have been talking about taking you to London," said Colonel Fortescue, "but we think it will do quite as well to wait another year before we make fine ladies of you."

"Quite," returned Florence readily; "I don't want to go at all."

Magdalen was not especially appealed to, and remained silent.

Mrs. Fortescue was very well content that it should be settled in this manner. The mystery that hung over the two girls had embittered her life, and she shrank from anything that brought it vividly before her. While they were children, it had remained comparatively out of sight; but now

it seemed continually rising up, phantom-like, between her and happiness. It was a constant struggle to her to act towards Magdalen in accordance with the promptings of her own conscience, and any short-comings towards her were sure to be noticed by Colonel Fortescue, and to excite his displeasure. From the first she had resented the introduction of a stranger into her nursery. "The child may be some beggar's brat," she had once said angrily to her husband; and yet, though she professed not to have the shadow of a doubt as to Florence's identity, there was often a misgiving in the depths of her heart about it; and Nurse Cooper's prophecy that "to be sure one or the other would be the very moral of its parents," was not fulfilled; for though they were both unlike each other, they were not sufficiently like anyone else for it to be any proof of identity.

No one at Waverton knew the facts relating to the infancy of the two girls but their old nurse, and Colonel Fortescue had so strictly interdicted the subject, that she never spoke of it in any other way than by giving the mysterious hints which had so much excited Florence's curiosity. The result of this constant annoyance and repression of feeling was to create a *gêne*, and in some degree to deaden the affection Mrs. Fortescue would naturally have felt towards the children ; for she was a kind and true-hearted woman, with every wish to do her duty to those around her. But this sorrow she had, from the first, as Nurse Cooper said, " taken hard," and she had never properly recovered from it.

Though she wished to be kind and considerate to all, and really took trouble to find out the girls' wishes, and to further them, if possible, still her love, the sympa-

thy and tenderness that sprung spontaneously and came naturally without an effort, belonged only to her husband and son. She was conscious of occasionally feeling indignant when Magdalen claimed her time and attention as a right ; then a feeling of compunction would seize her, her manner would suddenly change and have that appearance of fitfulness and uncertainty of which Florence so much complained. She was not especially capricious, and yet her behaviour was constantly the very embodiment of caprice. It was scarcely likely that, with this kind of experience, Magdalen should volunteer her confidence on such a subject as her attachment to a man who had not as yet declared his love.

CHAPTER XI.

That place that doth contain
 My books, the best companion is to me;
 A glorious court where hourly I converse
 With the old doges and philosophers.

BEAUMONT and FLETCHER.

The past is Death's, the future is thine own.
 SHELLEY.

WHEN Sir Henry Harcourt took Magdalen back to the ball-room, after the conversation in which he had given her to understand that his future was left to her decision, he went to look for Colonel Fortescue, to tell him that he must leave Waverton early in the morning. The words he had spoken had been drawn from him inadvertently. He had not meant to express in any way his attachment at present,

but the sorrow displayed in Magdalen's countenance at the idea of his departure had drawn them from him almost against his will. The moment they had passed his lips he would have given worlds to recall them. Not that he doubted his own heart; he knew that he loved Magdalen with the intensity that belonged to a reserved and passionate nature; but there were other reasons, deep and weighty considerations, which made him anxious for delay. He knew that what he had said would bind him irrevocably to her, and, till he had cleared every obstacle, real or fancied, that stood in the way of his declaring himself her acknowledged lover, he could not trust himself to see her again.

Colonel Fortescue had retired for the night, and Sir Henry was obliged to content himself with writing a note to him, saying that unexpected business had called him

228 COLONEL FORTESCUE'S DAUGHTER.

away too early to see the rest of the family, begging him to make his apologies to Mrs. Fortescue, and expressing a hope that before long he might be able to return and make them in person. He then went to look for his servant, who, being a Frenchman, was entirely in his element, dancing to his heart's content, and talking fast and energetically about the delights of Waverton, after "the abominable hole in Scotland, that was so *triste*, and that Monsieur delighted in!" He was expatiating loudly upon the horrors of Inchargan when his master came up to him.

"I shall be obliged to go away by the early train, Fontil. You had better come up and pack my things. It will not take you long; and then you must secure one of the flies that are waiting here to fetch us in the morning—it will save trouble. Do you hear?" he continued, as Monsieur Fontil did not reply, and only looked at his master

with a face of dismay that was almost ludicrous.

"To go from here—to go back to Scotland?" he asked, in a tone of utter despair.

"Not at present, so you need not break your heart about that—we are going south. But if your love of dancing is so great that you cannot leave it off a few minutes sooner than you expected, I will give you an hour's law. I will look up my things meanwhile."

"Monsieur was very good, very considerate—he always was so kind; but was it really necessary to go away so very early?"

"Absolutely necessary," replied Sir Henry, sternly enough to check Monsieur Fontil's volubility. "Come to my room in an hour. Meanwhile secure the fly, and give this note to the housekeeper to deliver in the morning."

Cowed and silent, Monsieur Fontil obeyed, and spent the time allowed him in loud

lamentations over his hard fate, and abuse of "that vile Inchargan," where there was not a house near, and as to a shop there was none! Whatever had to be done they were obliged to do it themselves. It was "incroyable, vraiment incroyable," how he had survived his existence there! Though he was not condemned to return to Scotland, he was full of regret at being obliged to leave the festivities of Waverton so abruptly. He had been of great use in the charades and tableaux, and had become a general favourite, and been made much of accordingly. He had lived with Sir Henry many years, and was an excellent and trustworthy servant, and, in spite of all that his master's "bizarre" fancy for solitude had made him endure, he would not for the world have left his service.

Both master and man had plenty of time for regrets and meditations between Waverton and Combe Abbey, which was situated

in the south of Devonshire, and took many hours to reach, now that travelling is computed by time and not by distance.

Sir Henry had lived very little at Combe Abbey since he came into the property. There were some painful associations connected with it, and, when he was not travelling abroad, the Lodge at Inchargan—the shooting-box which so much exasperated Monsieur Fontil—was his usual home. It was a lonely place, without any interest beyond the shooting and fishing; but he had, or thought he had, exhausted life—had read, written, travelled, and at eight and thirty fallen back on a solitary life, with no companionship beyond his dog and his gun.

Combe Abbey was a beautiful old house in the south of Devon, where the foliage was luxuriant down to the sea-shore, and where the soft, mild climate produced a richness of vegetation not to be found in any

other part of England. Sir Henry had once been very fond of the place, and, as he approached the house, and drove through the lovely scenery that had been familiar to him from childhood, he thought with a thrill of delight how happy he could yet be in the old home with Magdalen for a companion. But was it certain that her happiness would be equally secure? There was so much difference in their ages. He had been rash and precipitate not to have considered this before, and the moody, unsocial turn of mind which habits of solitude had produced, might have rendered him a totally unfit companion for a young and beautiful girl. His great sensitiveness and distrust of himself amounted almost to a disease. He was, as we have said, not yet forty years old, and yet he looked upon himself in the light of an old man.

The sudden and deep interest with which

Magdalen had inspired him, had taken him quite by surprise ; for it was many years since he had been fascinated by any woman, and towards the many young ladies and their mothers by whom he had been considered an eligible *parti*, and consequently flattered and courted, his heart had been adamant.

In early life he had been much attached to a beautiful girl, who, after giving every encouragement, jilted him in favour of a wealthy suitor, whose broad acres were his single recommendation. The distrust of human nature and bitterness of feeling with which her conduct had inspired him, were such as to change a light-hearted boy into a reserved, self-contained man. He never spoke of his trouble, but took refuge in solitude, study, and travelling in foreign lands, which, after a time, became a sort of necessity to his life. He was not then the owner, or

even the heir of Combe Abbey; only a nephew of the Baronet who then held the title. He became heir to the property on the death of his cousin in India. When he found himself the possessor of a large fortune, the memory of his early disappointment came back to him with redoubled bitterness. He had besides another cause of deep and painful anxiety.

At the time of his cousin's death he received a sealed packet. Among other papers was a letter in which Arthur related the story of his marriage with a girl of low birth, of the name of Mildred Clements, and blamed himself severely for his subsequent neglect of her. He implored his cousin to make every inquiry for her and her child, and to do all in his power to see them righted. Sir Arthur was then alive, but in a most precarious state, and Sir Henry was at a loss to know how to proceed in the

matter. If it were prosecuted in earnest it would be impossible to avoid publicity, and the knowledge of his son's imprudence would be the death of Sir Arthur, as well as embitter his last days. Sir Henry consulted Dr. Croly, and acted upon his advice, which was, to let the matter stand over for the present, as Sir Arthur could not live long, and no particular advantage could be gained for Arthur's child, if one existed, during its grandfather's life.

After Sir Arthur's death, Sir Henry advertised in all the newspapers, and made every possible inquiry—but all to no purpose; for Mildred was in her grave while Sir Henry was endeavouring to repair his cousin's fault. No tidings of her ever reached him, and the uncertainty which hung over the fate of his cousin's wife and possible child made his position a very embarrassing one. He never felt sure that he

was the rightful owner of his name and property, and lived in the constant expectation of some one springing up to wrest them from him.

Sir Henry's father was the only brother of Sir Arthur Harcourt. He had married when very young, and his wife died in giving birth to their only child. At his death, which occurred while young Henry was but a child, he entrusted his son to the care of his old friend and tutor, Dr. Croly, who faithfully and lovingly fulfilled the charge, watching over his ward, who was brought up with his cousin under his uncle, Sir Arthur's roof, but under the eye of Dr. Croly.

As he drove up to the house, the barred door and closed shutters, and the length of time he had to wait before anyone obeyed his summons, showed how few visitors disturbed the old housekeeper's repose; and her aspect, when she saw that the un-

welcome intruder was her master, was any-
thing but inviting.

"Well, Sir Henry, how little I ever
thought you would come down upon us
like this, and not a line—not as ever I got,
however—so that I might have a thing
ready."

"Never mind, Mrs. Jones, I don't want
anything got ready. Only a fire, and a bed
to sleep on."

"And something to eat, I suppose, Sir
Henry, and there is nothing in the house
that will do for that Frenchman, even if you
saw fit to put up with it; and every bit of
furniture in the house has got covers on.
It's just as if you thought things were going
on wrong, to come down on one on a sudden
like this," she muttered.

"Indeed I don't," he replied, rather an-
noyed at such a very cross reception, and
anxious to remove the impression which

must have caused it. "I know all things go on right when you are there, Mrs. Jones."

The fact was Mrs. Jones was indulging in a comfortable nap by the fire, and was too flustered and put out to be able at all to recover her equanimity.

"I daresay I shall dine out," he continued ; "if not you can give me something later. I am going out now. Let me find a fire in the library when I come in."

Mrs. Jones looked after him, as he walked quickly down the garden, in mute astonishment. "Whatever can it mean, coming like this after all this time, and then going straight out of the house after travelling so many hours? I shan't find the Frenchman in this mood, I know." Mrs. Jones had a great aversion to Monsieur Fontil.

Sir Henry walked through the garden into a lane, and then through a little wicket

which led into the churchyard. It was cold and very dark; but a light, which burnt brightly in a house near the church, guided his steps. He went up to it, and opening the door, which was unfastened, found himself in a small lobby lighted by a lamp which hung over his head. At this moment a servant came upstairs with a bottle of port-wine in his hand, and, stopping short, looked at him in amazement.

"Is the Doctor at home, and all well, Samuel?" he said, taking the bottle out of the man's hand. "Let me take this in—don't tell him I am here."

"Indeed I won't, Sir Henry—I never knewed it myself!" exclaimed the man, utterly confounded by the sudden and unexpected apparition.

He stood by while Sir Henry opened the door of a room where a venerable-looking old man was fast asleep in an arm-chair by

the fire. There were candles on the table, biscuits and oranges, and every evidence of Dr. Croly having enjoyed his dinner; for the newspaper on his knee, and his gold spectacles pushed up over his forehead, showed that he had fallen asleep before Samuel could bring up his second bottle of port.

For a minute the doctor did not stir; then, suddenly opening his eyes, he fixed them upon his visitor, first with an expression of utter vacancy, then of alarm, and finally of delighted recognition.

"My dear boy, when did you come? I never knew that you were here." The middle-aged man was still young in the eyes of the old friend who had known and loved him from his earliest childhood.

"I did very wrong, dear Doctor! I slipped into the house like a thief, and usurped Samuel's place," said Sir Henry, shaking the old man's hand warmly. "But

I am disappointed to find that you have dined. I met with such a cross reception from Mrs. Jones, that I came here to beg for a dinner."

"And you shall have one gladly. It's not a quarter of an hour since I sent it away—a bit of mutton, Dartmoor mutton, you know, Harry, and an apple tart. Enough for you, I daresay. And so old mother Jones was not pleased to see you? Being taken by surprise is just the thing that would put her out most. And, Lord bless my heart! I feel as if I were dreaming still—I made so sure you were in Scotland."

"I am afraid you will have very substantial proof of my presence soon, Doctor, for I am as hungry as a hunter, having breakfasted at seven, and having had little enough since. And now tell me how you are? Well, I am sure; for you look as young as ever!"

"Pretty sound as yet, thank God! but this cold weather pinches me a good deal. Here, Samuel, bring back the dinner—the mutton and tart, just as I had it—for Sir Henry. My dear fellow, I am so delighted to see you at the old place once again. And what did Mrs. Jones say? She would be sadly put out, I am sure."

"She did not seem at all delighted to see me. On the contrary, fairly drove me out of the house by her scolding, to take refuge here."

"Then you will stay here, I hope? Your room will be ready in no time."

"I must sleep at home, thank you. But I shall torment you a good deal in the day, I've no doubt. In fact, I came to see you; so that probably you will have so much of my company that you will wish me in Scotland again."

"Never! I only wish that I could per-

suade you to live here altogether, Harry. Absenteeism is always bad—bad for the place, bad for the people, and bad for you. Upon my soul, I believe it,” said the old man, earnestly.

“ Well, it’s partly about that—about living here—that I want to talk to you. Even if I could divest my mind of all the old painful impressions connected with the place, I am not sure that I could afford it.”

“ Why not? You are not expected to keep open house for all the country round—and your life in Scotland cannot be very expensive.”

“ Certainly not; but you know that I determined not to live here till all the debts on the property were paid off, and I don’t know how all that stands now.”

“ Nor I; but I do know that if you put it off much longer I shall be in my grave, and never see it,” said the old man, mournfully.

"But here is the dinner. You will have some ale—Scotch ale, Samuel—and we can talk after."

Sir Henry did ample justice to the Dartmoor mutton and Dr. Croly's dinner generally. As soon as it was over he ordered tea to be brought into the study, where they both adjourned.

"A pair of friends, though 'he' was young,
And Matthew seventy-two."

"Well, Harry, now tell me what brought you here?"

Sir Henry was not "Harry" to anyone but the old man who had played with him, taught him, chided him, and sympathised with him all his life. He was the clergyman of Combe, and had been the greatest friend, as well as tutor, of Sir Arthur Harcourt and his brother Henry, the father of Sir Henry.

"Mostly to ask your advice, dear doctor."

"About your pointer puppies?—or has Fontil run rusty at last?"

"Neither; but seriously, dear old friend, I am anxious and perplexed, and cannot at this moment see my way. You know I have been staying at Waverton?"


"Waverton!—is that Colonel Fortescue's?—is it not the place his uncle left him? A queer old fish that uncle was, but I scarcely knew this man. I remember his wife before she married—Miss Lennox—Georgina Lennox, a pretty, very pretty girl."

"She is a pretty woman still, though not what you remember her, I suppose? Certainly not as pretty as either of her daughters."

"Oh!" said Dr. Croly, as daylight seemed dawning upon his mind. "There are grown-up daughters, then?"

"Yes, two; and a son at school."

"Well, and one of these daughters——"



"How I wish you knew them ! One of them, the youngest, Magdalen, is lovelier and more charming than any woman I ever met. I cannot imagine more perfect happiness for any man than to call Magdalen Fortescue his wife."

"But have you asked her to be your wife ? Is it all settled ? I am delighted at what you tell me. You know I have always said that you should marry. Marriage is the only thing for you. I am an old bachelor myself, but you were never meant for it."

"I don't know that. There has always seemed a fate against it, and, with the doubt and uncertainty that still hangs over me, and ever must, I am not sure that I am right in asking her to link her fate with mine. Besides, doctor, you always say that I am moody and unsocial, and ready to create ills that don't exist."

"Do you mean to say that Arthur's letter will prevent your ever marrying, or have old recollections risen up in your mind to make you distrust Miss Fortescue?"

"No; I was thinking of my peculiar position, and whether I am justified in marrying, as it were, on false pretences, and when the door may open any day to admit a rival claimant to the name and land I hold. How can I be secure against this?"

"It is only a remote probability, at all events. But tell me, Harry, have you proposed yet?"

"No, in fact; and yes, in truth. She must know my feelings towards her. I have said enough to pledge me to her for life. I never intended to say anything before speaking to you."

"It is a perplexing question, I confess. Would it not be best to tell the facts to Colonel Fortescue, and let him judge for

his daughter? I think it would be right; and, after all, you would be very well off with your own and your mother's fortune, even if you were to lose Combe Abbey."

"I should think he would certainly object to his daughter's marriage to a man who is, in a certain sense, an adventurer."

"Nonsense, Harry; that is your gloomy, morbid way of viewing things. As if you had not done everything that was possible!—advertised, searched everywhere. Has not your life been spent in trying to repair your cousin's fault? Poor Arthur! I wish he had confided in me! I always think this must have been the reason that he avoided me so much the last few months he was in England. Poor lad! he might have known that I should never have been hard upon him!"

Dr. Croly relapsed into grave thoughts, and the tears stood in his eyes as he thought

of the boy now dead, and his widow, and perhaps his child, living in obscurity and want.

"Then you think that I may try to win her?" interrupted Sir Henry eagerly, his countenance showing the relief his old friend's words were to him. "If I am fortunate enough to succeed, it will be the one endeavour of my life to make Magdalen happy."

"She would be a very perverse hussy if she were not happy here, and with you, Harry," said Dr. Croly, walking up and down the room, and rubbing his hands in the exuberance of his delight. "I cannot tell you how happy you have made me; and now you must go back to Waverton to woo and win the young lady, and bring her here to gladden my old eyes before I go home, and am no more seen," said the old man solemnly, in Scripture phraseology. "And

now, Harry, there must be no more looking back, no more misgivings. All must be bright as sunshine. You will think I am talking a great deal, and giving you a regular lecture; but the fact is, I am very happy to-night, and glad of the chance of letting my tongue run on."

There was much good sense in the doctor's rambling talk, and so Sir Henry felt.

"I mistrusted my own judgment, doctor, and so I came to you. I could not help feeling such a one as she is deserved a better fate."


"What better fate can befall a woman than to marry the man she loves, and I'm much mistaken if she does not love you already? The greatest fault you can commit now, is not to let her know that her love is returned. It is late now, Harry, and I *must* go to bed, but I shall see you again to-morrow. God bless you, boy, and bring

your wife here soon enough for me to be able to bless her too."

Sir Henry wrung the old man's hand, and left the room without speaking, for his heart was full. The stars shone brightly overhead, as he walked rapidly home, and the light in his own house seemed to welcome him as he approached, and to tell of home and rest to the weary wanderer.

Mrs. Jones met him at the door, and led the way with a light into the library, where a bright fire was burning. She had made the room comfortable enough, and stood waiting to know if there was anything more that he wished for, apparently penitent for her former ungraciousness.

"Nothing, Mrs. Jones, nothing, thank you. I needn't keep you up longer. I am sorry to have been obliged to return so unexpectedly, without being able to give you any notice."



"Oh! pray, Sir Henry—indeed, don't mention it—I was so flurried and taken by surprise, that I did not know what to do first. A house does look so sad when it's shut up—it's enough to make a gentleman take against it, and we've been hoping so much that you would come soon for good and all."

Sir Henry wished Mrs. Jones good night, and then sat down in the arm-chair that was drawn before the fire—his own especial chair, with a reading-desk affixed to it; and, as he looked round the room and watched the firelight flicker upon the backs of his dearly-loved books, he felt as if they were old and valued friends that he had long neglected. He took out one after another, and then knew how glad he was to be with them again.

"Thank God for books," said Sidney Smith; and who that has known what it is

to depend on them for companionship, but will say from his heart, Amen? In lone country homes where friends are few, in crowded city streets, amid greeting where no kindness is, thank God for books. Dearest, best of friends, soothing, comforting, teaching, carrying us far away from the briers of this working-day world, never importunate, never impatient, may we learn to use you as you use us!

These words, so true in themselves, express in a great measure Sir Henry Harcourt's state of mind. Now that a bright future seemed dawning upon him, he felt how lonely and desolate his past life had been. He was too restless to sleep, and sat dreamily looking into the fire, till a necessity for expressing the thoughts and feelings that crowded into his mind made him open the pianoforte, which had been very silent of late years. He played melody after melody,

entwining them with his own hopes and fears, till Mrs. Jones, awakened from her first sleep by the unaccustomed sound, started up in her bed in alarm, and then sank down on her pillow, saying,

“Whatever strange thing has happened to Sir Henry! First he wants no food, and now it seems he wants no sleep! He must be in love at last, sure-ly.”

CHAPTER XII.

I have a room whereinto no one enters
 Save I myself alone :
 There sits a blessed memory on a throne,
 There my life centres.

C. ROSETTI.

True love in this differs from gold and clay,
 That to divide is not to take away.

SHELLEY.

SEVERAL weeks had elapsed, and yet Sir Henry had never returned to Waverton. In fact, he and Magdalen had not met since they parted on New Year's Eve, the memorable night of the ball. But from the first she had always felt a deep and quiet trust in him, which prevented the suspense being as trying as it otherwise would have been. She felt so sure that sooner or later he would come and claim her for his

own, and believed that there were good and sufficient reasons that kept him away at present. He had frequently written to Colonel Fortescue, and every letter had contained a definite and distinct message to Magdalen, generally relating to music or books, and referred to in a way that showed that no wish or opinion she had ever expressed had been forgotten by him.

The fact was that he had been detained in London by unavoidable business much longer than he had expected. Dr. Croly had urged him to expedite everything that could affect his marriage, and he felt that the first step should be to investigate thoroughly the state of his affairs, and to put everything relating to his property on a footing that would be satisfactory to Colonel Fortescue. This of necessity involved considerable time and trouble, though he found the property in far better order, and his

affairs generally in a more satisfactory condition, than he had dared to hope. As soon as he had ascertained this, he wrote to Mrs. Fortescue, proposing to come down to Waverton the ensuing week. The letter, however, followed her to Iffley Court, where she had been summoned to attend her mother's death-bed. Lady Lennox had been for some years confined to her room, but the end came suddenly and unexpectedly at last. No one accompanied Mrs. Fortescue but her husband. Florence and Magdalen remained alone at Waverton, so that they never knew of the letter, which, in the hurry and distress caused by Lady Lennox's death, remained unanswered.

Some time had passed since Sir Henry Harcourt's last letter, and Magdalen's heart grew weary, and her spirits began to flag. She could not altogether repress some misgivings when she thought how long it was

since she had heard any tidings of him. But she struggled bravely against them, and reproached herself seriously for want of generosity. The subject had never been broached to Florence, so she had to bear her own burthen alone.

The cold light evenings of early spring had their usual depressing influence upon an organization so susceptible as Magdalen's. Florence had a healthier tone of mind and body, and was in consequence less impressionable. Besides she had a growing interest in the inhabitants of Broome Hall, which occupied her a good deal, and made Magdalen's anxiety less apparent to her.

"I wish papa and mamma would come back, Maggie," said Florence one morning at breakfast. "We can do so little while we are alone. It is very tiresome to ride with Nash, and now we cannot ride together. Besides we cannot see any one or pay any

visits." "Not even the Vivians" she was going to say, but changed it consciously for "the Latimers." "It is such a lovely day—only listen to the singing of the thrushes! We cannot stay at home to-day."

"Then let us go out at once, Florence; these sort of bright spring mornings generally turn to rain. The first warm day always makes one feel restless and unsettled. Suppose you finish the sketch of the church that you began so long ago. I will read to you, if you like, while you draw.'

Florence agreed, and the two girls were soon walking across the park, with books and camp stools, to the spot where the drawing had originally been begun.

It was a beautiful morning, with a soft west wind, and fleecy clouds that passed rapidly over the sky—a day in which the sights and sounds of spring pervaded the whole earth; and yet, exquisitely lovely as it

was, it had a saddening influence even on Florence. The first few spring days are intensely sad! It is so seldom that human hearts throb in harmony with the re-awakening of all nature to life and hope. Even with the happiest, the conviction of the transient nature of that happiness brings with it an undertone of melancholy which mingles with nature's most triumphant strain of thanksgiving. Both sisters were keenly alive to the beauty around them; the primroses in the hedgerows, the violets that were peeping out of mossy banks, the soft wood anemone and the tender green of the young shoots, were all, in their turn, lingered over and admired. Happy children's voices sounded strong and clear, and mingled with the singing of the birds. There was a fullness and richness that day in nature's revelry.

"Oh! Magdalen," said Florence, when

they had gathered handfuls of wild flowers, and had laid them down on the grass while she arranged her drawings, "are you not glad that we did not go to London? Spring in London gives one a positive heartache. I always wonder why people go to London when the country is loveliest. I think, with Beattie, it is wicked :

‘ Oh ! how canst thou renounce
The boundless store which nature to her votary yields,
The warbling woodland, the resounding shore,
The pomp of groves, the garniture of fields,
And all the dread magnificence of Heaven—
Oh ! how canst thou renounce, and hope to be forgiven? ”

repeated Florence. "It surely demands forgiveness, I think. I wonder, too, why pain and pleasure always seem to run side by side! A day like this makes all kinds of sad thoughts come into one's mind. I have been thinking so much of grandmamma. I wish we had seen her again. Do you remember how long we were with her as little

children, Magdalen? We were so very fond of her then."

"Then and always," said Magdalen, warmly. "I never knew her to do an unkind thing in my life. We have seen very little of her of late years."

"Very little indeed, and I often wonder why we were with her so much as children. Do you know I think that ever since that last illness of grandmamma's, and since she has been in the habit of talking rather at random, and mixing up things together, mamma has always seemed afraid of letting us be alone with her?"

"I have often thought so too, and then supposed it was only a fancy; but it could not have been, if it also occurred to you."

"I am sure it was not fancy, Magdalen. I wonder if we shall ever know the mystery!"

"I can't tell; but I had better read to

you, and not talk about it. Here is 'Childe Harold,' and the last volume of Mrs. Hemans. Which will you have? You will have finished your drawing before I begin to read."

"I should not attend, Maggie, just now—my head is full of other things."

"Do you see that strange-looking woman, Florence?" said Magdalen, in a low voice.

"Where? That old woman dressed in black?"

"Yes; she has been standing there watching us for the last half hour."

"What can she want? She does not look poor."

"She is the dreary-looking woman that lives at Mr. Millard's farm. Papa asked who she was the other day."

"What can she possibly want? Perhaps she is mad, and shut up there."

"I don't know, but she is always turning up when one least expects it. One day she

startled me by looking over the wall into our garden, and then in church—I don't think you can see her where you sit—she fixes her eyes upon me in the strangest way. She makes me feel so odd and uncomfortable.”

“I wonder why she lives there! Shall we go and see Mrs. Millard, Magdalen, and try to find out something about her?”

“Certainly not. I can't bear seeing her—she looks so weird—so uncanny. I should be glad to know that I should never see her again.”

“What was that?” exclaimed Florence, as a heavy drop of rain splashed upon her drawing.

Another and another, and then one of those pelting spring showers which come so suddenly and unexpectedly, and which, as they had neither cloaks nor umbrellas, considerably disconcerted them.


They looked round for some shelter, but there was none at hand, and they could only remain where they were, at the foot of an old oak-tree whose leafless branches were not of much service. Presently they heard a footstep, and saw the woman of whom they had been speaking running towards them. She had a cloak over her arm, which she folded round Magdalen with great care, saying,

"It will keep you dry, and if you will leave it here I will fetch it."

"Thank you, but I really don't want it," said Magdalen, startled and annoyed at the woman's manner.

"Don't say that—pray keep it on while the rain lasts," she said, clasping her hands as if in supplication.

"Don't contradict her, Magdalen," said Florence in a whisper, believing her to be insane.



"But you will get wet, Florence. Let me put it round you too."

"That does not signify, I can change my things when I go home."

Mrs. Clements—for it is needless to say that she was the strange woman—retreated to some distance, but still kept her eyes fixed upon the two girls with an anxious, yearning look which made them both feel nervous and uncomfortable. Though the storm had been sudden and heavy, it was not of long duration. There was soon a break in the clouds, then a gleam of sunlight, and presently brilliant sunshine in which the rain-drops glistened as they reflected it.

Very much relieved, Magdalen took off the cloak, and was about to return it to its owner, when Mrs. Clements came quickly towards them, saying,

"It's too wet for you to cross the grass."


"I am very much obliged to you," said Magdalen, "but I am afraid you must have got wet yourself. I am sorry you came out in the rain to give me your cloak."

"And I am glad—so glad to have seen you—to have seen you both," she said, correcting herself. "Maybe I shan't have the chance again. I've looked for this a long time."

"Why do you want to see us?" asked Florence, quickly. "Can we do anything for you?"

"Nothing at all, thank you," she replied, recalled to herself by Florence's sudden question. "I am so glad I have been of any service—some day I hope to see you again, young ladies. Good morning, miss," and Mrs. Clements walked quietly away.

Magdalen and Florence looked at each other in amazement. "What an extraordinary woman!" was their simultaneous exclamation.




"It's only you, however, that she cares about, Magdalen—I wish you joy of your friend."

"We must go home quickly, Florence, you are quite wet. I cannot help thinking this woman must have known us as children, or lived with mamma or papa, perhaps."

"Then papa would have known her, and not asked who she was; and, besides, that would not account for her marked preference for you. No, I believe she is crazy—crazy people do take strange fancies."

"Thank you," said Magdalen, laughing; "I don't at all want her to fancy me. I shall ask Nurse if she knows anything about her. Here she is," she added, as she saw the old woman looking out for them. "Nurse, come to our room; Florence is wet through, and wants you to take off her things; and I want to talk to you meanwhile."



"You must be both wet, I should think, such a storm as it's been. How is it that Miss Florence is so much the wettest? You seem pretty dry," and Mrs. Cooper proceeded to undress Florence, while Magdalen stood by, knowing that it would be useless to try and gain her attention till that operation was completed.

"Now, nurse, listen to me, I want to talk to you."

"Well, Miss Magdalen, what is it? But let me see first if your shoes are wet."

"Quite dry, nurse—dry as a bone," said Florence, impatiently.

"We want to know if you can tell us anything about a strange, dreary-looking woman who lives at Mr. Millard's farm."

"No, I can't; except that she came here from Lexborough. No one knew why she came here, or anything at all about her. She is not of these parts, I believe,

and don't seem to take up with anybody."

"Except Magdalen," said Florence, laughing. "She seems very much disposed to take up with her, as you call it."

"What's that, Miss Florence? What did you say?" asked the old woman, eagerly, evidently now interested in the conversation.

"What has she to say to Miss Magdalen?"

"That is exactly what we don't know, and what we are asking you about. Magdalen says that woman is always looking at her in church, and that she peers over the wall into our garden; and to-day, as soon as the rain came on, she came rushing out with a cloak, which she wrapped round her. She did not concern herself much about me, I must say. But she had been watching us all the time. I think she must be mad."

"I think so too; at all events, I am dreadfully afraid of her," said Magdalen. "She is so strange. I wonder if she ever lived

with papa or mamma—do you know, nurse?—or what her name is? I am always seeing her, and she positively haunts me!”

“I did hear her name once, but I’ve forgot it. It’s not a name as I ever heard before. What did she say to you, Miss Magdalen, dear?” asked the old woman, anxiously.

“Why, nurse, I do believe you know something about her,” exclaimed Magdalen, turning round quickly, and looking eagerly into the nurse’s face.

“Of course I don’t—how should I, Miss Magdalen?”

But Nurse Cooper had a very transparent countenance, and Magdalen was not satisfied.

“You do, dear old nurse!—I am sure you do. Now tell me what it is?”

“We know there is something, nurse,” said Florence; “something we don’t know, and this strange woman may have to do with it. Mamma and papa are away, and we

can't ask them, so do tell us, like a good dear old woman, and if it's a secret we won't tell it, and then we need not ask mamma, or anybody."

"Whatever can I have to tell, Miss Florence?" pleaded the nurse. "There is nothing to tell—of course not. Only for pity's sake don't tease your mamma about that woman, or any fancies you may have taken about her."

"Why not?" asked Florence. "I certainly must." She saw that this was the only way in which she could influence Mrs. Cooper. "This is all nonsense, nurse; for, if there is nothing to know, why shouldn't we ask? Besides, we have so often heard you talk of some trouble."

"No, indeed, Miss Florence—really you are mistaken," said the old woman, looking frightened. "I certainly never meant to say anything of the kind."

"But, whatever you meant, you did," persisted Florence, "over and over again. Didn't she, Magdalen?"

"Yes, often. Why won't you tell us, dear nurse—we are not children now?"

"If she don't, I shall ask mamma, and tell her about this strange woman, as soon as she comes home."

"Well, then, I think it's very unkind, Miss Florence, I do, to worret one like this," and she turned away with tears of vexation in her eyes.

"Don't tease her, Florence," whispered Magdalen.

"Yes, I shall—it's the only way to make her tell us, and I want to know very much. Now, nurse," she said, aloud, "if you will tell us about the trouble that happened when we were babies, I won't ask mamma; if not——"

"When you were babies?" repeated the

old woman, aghast at this proof of Florence's extraordinary penetration.

"Yes, when we were babies; for I can remember all that has ever happened since we lived here, and some of the time we lived with grandmamma while papa was abroad; and it must have been after either I or Magdalen was born, or else you would not have been with us."

"You forget I lived with your mamma before she married, dear."

"Yes, I know," said Florence, rather discomfited by this fact. "But whatever it is, it did not happen when mamma was a child herself. Besides, it was not then, I feel certain. Papa and mamma both often look as if there was something they would not talk about before us. And oh! by-the-bye, nurse, papa said something I overheard one day about our being the same age. Are we twins, then?—only twins are always alike, are they not?"

"I am sure you are not that," said Mrs. Cooper, now completely on her guard; "you have got a pack of fancies into your head, dear. But don't plague your mamma about it all—she's had trouble enough."

"What trouble has she had? I don't know of any."

"Well, there's trouble now, and your poor grandmamma not been buried a week."

"Yes, but that is only just now, and you did not mean that, nurse, so that's all humbug."

"But you have not told us anything about this strange woman, after all," said Magdalen—"is there no one who knows anything about her?"

"You see nurse does not know anything about her, Magdalen, and she won't tell us anything she does know; she is a tiresome old woman," said Florence, half provoked at her failure in inducing Mrs. Cooper to

“I have a great mind to go out and get wet through again just to plague her. Look how stormy it is, Magdalen—I shall go and finish this drawing now. There is no chance of going out again to-day.”

“Miss Magdalen, darling,” said the nurse, after Florence had left the room, “what is it about this woman?—what did she say?”

“Nothing particular, except that she was so glad to see us, and she looks at me all church-time, and seems to haunt me especially wherever I go; and then she gave me her cloak to-day, and took no notice whatever of Florence.”

“I’ll ask who she is, and tell you; but, Miss Magdalen, don’t say anything to your mamma about her, and it’s no good to say much about her to anybody—not to talk as you have been talking to me to-day. It might do a deal of harm, though it’s all fancies, of course.”

"I don't believe a word about it's being all fancy, nurse, but I won't say anything about her."

"Nor let Miss Fortescue, to Miss Vivian or anybody."

"I can't help what Florence does, nurse, can I?"

"Well, but you will promise not to tease your mamma about it?"

"I will promise, if you like, nurse, if it makes you happier; but I think it all very odd, and you will be obliged to tell me some day."

"I hope not," said the old woman, looking after her as she left the room—"I hope not; it will be a bad day for everybody when that has to be done?"

CHAPTER XIII.

It seems as though but yesterday
 Thy living hand had traced these lines ;
 I cannot deem thee far away
 While gazing on these speaking signs.

Here paused thy swiftly flowing pen
 Never again to flow from me ;
 Our glad communion ended then
 In this thy latest gift to me.

But thy dear love is here embalmed
 Unchangeably, for ever mine,
 All fear of loss for ever calmed,
 As though my hand were clasped in thine.

T. A. S.

ALL speculations about the strange woman were put to flight the next day by a letter announcing that Colonel and Mrs. Fortescue would arrive the same evening. Both Florence and Magdalen had become tired of solitude and seclusion, and

yet there was some anxiety mingled with the pleasure with which they received the intelligence. They knew how devotedly attached Mrs. Fortescue had been to her mother, and how deeply she had felt her death ; and, as is constantly the case, even with those who are most intimate, they felt a nervous fear of not saying and doing exactly the right thing, or of doing anything that might possibly jar upon her ; a dread of being either too demonstrative or not sufficiently sympathetic. There is something new and somewhat appalling to the young in the aspect of a person who has recently gone through any great sorrow. It seems to remove them so far off, and to place them on such a different level.


These feelings were rather increased than dispelled after their mother's arrival, for Mrs. Fortescue was naturally reserved where her feelings were deeply interested, and she

so evidently shrank from anything like demonstration, that Lady Lennox's name became at once a sealed book to Florence and Magdalen ; her existence buried and out of sight, as far as their intercourse with their mother was concerned. It is always a trial to young people not to give utterance to what presses upon their minds at the moment. Later in life it is very different, and often a painful effort to do so. The burthen is then usually borne alone. People continually judge of the depth and acuteness of grief by its expression. Nothing can be more mistaken. It is generally simply a case of temperament, though it is tolerably certain that silent griefs sink deeper and endure longer than those that find vent in words ; "*silence douloureux qui fait tout refouler sur soi-même.*" In Mrs. Fortescue's case, the conscious feeling of restraint she had with her daughters prevented her ever

allowing them to approach her very closely. The consequence of this had been to throw them almost entirely upon each other for companionship. They were very fond of their father ; but there are times in the life of a girl when only the intuitive knowledge a mother possesses can give the sympathy that is needed.

Magdalen often thought that her mother disliked her. This was not true ; but the two were far apart. "*Elle lui inspirait, sans qu'elle s'en rendit clairement compte, ce sentiment qui est comme la frontière de la haine, et qu'exprime si bien le mot éloignement.*" That untranslatable French word did exactly express Mrs. Fortescue's state of mind, which was neither aversion nor indifference.

An incident which occurred a few days after her mother's return convinced Magdalen more than ever of this fact. Lady



Lennox's property had, in the main, been left to her daughter, but there had been a few legacies to her servants, and a remembrance to each of her grandchildren. One morning Colonel Fortescué gave Florence and Magdalen each a small packet, addressed to them in Lady Lennox's hand. They carried the parcels up to their room, and Florence began eagerly to undo hers ; but Magdalen sat looking at the address of the one on her knee, without attempting to open it.

"Why don't you open your parcel, Magdalen?" said Florence, looking up in surprise. "I am so anxious to know what grandmamma has left us."

"I will ; but I was looking at the address. It seems so strange that this writing should remain just as she wrote it, and yet she herself——Few things make me feel so strange as seeing the writing of a person who is dead!"

Most of us have felt like Magdalen, how the sight of a few syllables written by one who has for ever left us speaks at once to our heart. Mrs. Norton has expressed this feeling in all its fulness :

“What is there in the signature of a beloved name which makes it more precious than all the written words that precede it ; what is there that makes it more bitter, when all is past and gone, to meet that name on the blank title-page of a book than to hear it spoken a thousand times in ordinary conversation, or to look on a hundred other memorials of lost happiness? The hand which traced it may be grown feeble and tremulous with age, or may be cold and forgotten dust in the grave—it may have become an empty sound ‘to which no living thing lays claim; but its magic name remains.’ We feel while we look on it that we behold the certain and visible stamp and impress of

a human existence since passed away like a shadow from the earth. Two syllables on that silent page make oath to us that a being was, with health, strength, and reason. *C'est une étincelle de sa vie*, a spark which burns on after the lamp of life is extinguished, a moment of the full possession of human energy of body and soul saved from the blank of a passed existence."

"I know what you mean, Magdalen ; but I do want to see what my parcel contains. Look ! it's that beautiful miniature of papa. How glad I am to have it !"

"And I have the bracelet with mamma's picture. Oh ! Florence, that is a treasure !"

The bracelet was a broad, engraved gold band, with Mrs. Fortescue's cypher on the case of the miniature in blue enamel and small diamonds.

"I am so glad that we have these pictures," said Florence. "Dear grandmamma ! it was

so like her, to give us just the things we care most to possess."

"But can I wear mine, Florence? I don't know what to do about it."

"Do you mean because we are in mourning?"

"No; but if I wear it perhaps mamma won't like to see it, and if I don't she may think I don't care about it."

"She won't mind your wearing it, Maggie. Of course she knows the pictures were left to us."

Florence was far less sensitive than Magdalen. Florence hung her father's picture on the wall, just over her writing-table. Magdalen clasped the bracelet on her arm, very happy in its possession.

When she came down she saw that it caught her mother's eye, and thought it would be better to say something about it. As soon as she was alone with her she said,

"Dear mamma, I am so glad to possess this ; I can't tell you how I value it."

"That bracelet? Oh ! I see," replied her mother, in a hard, indifferent tone. "I fancied it belonged to Florence."

"No, she has papa's picture."

"I should think she had better have both. I can find you another bracelet—one that was your grandmother's, a handsomer one than this."

"Mamma, you can't imagine that I value this except as being your picture and her legacy," said Magdalen, colouring deeply with annoyance and wounded feeling. "I will give this to Florence if you had rather that she had it, but I don't want to have anything instead."

"That's nonsense ; I only think it would be better for Florence to have both the pictures, as they were done at the same time—and by the same artist."

Magdalen burst into tears.

"Really if it is such a grievance, you need not do it," said Mrs. Fortescue coldly.

"I was only expressing a wish."

"Mamma, why don't you let me love you?" she said passionately; "why can't you care for me as you do for Florence and Ferdy? I would do anything if you would only love me!"

"Is this a complaint, Magdalen?" said Mrs. Fortescue coldly; "it is a curious time to choose."

"What can I say?" said poor Magdalen, in great distress. "All I do seems wrong. I had looked upon this as my greatest treasure; now, the very sight of it must bring pain always. Will you take it, mamma, and give it to Florence?"

And hastily unclasping the bracelet, she threw it into her mother's lap and ran out of the room.

She was much too deeply wounded to recover her spirits. Florence would not hear a word of the bracelet being transferred to herself; so it was put away in Magdalen's box. But she never wore it, and the impression made by Mrs. Fortescue's behaviour upon this occasion did not wear off. She had an abiding consciousness that her mother disliked her, and Magdalen was very sensitive to any want of affection from those around her. She was not made to live in a sunless atmosphere; so, though the summer days were long and bright, and birds and flowers were gay, and nature kept holiday around her, Magdalen's heart was very heavy.

But better times were coming. About a month after their return, Colonel Fortescue announced one morning at breakfast that he had had a letter from Sir Henry Harcourt, proposing a visit to Waverton.

"But not now, surely not now," said Mrs. Fortescue, with a shrinking dislike to new faces.

"I don't see how it is possible to put him off," said her husband, looking annoyed. "It seems that he wrote to me some time ago to the same effect; but we were away then, and I did not answer his letter. I cannot put him off again."

Magdalen, who was in the act of raising her cup to her lips when her father began to speak, quietly put it down again, as she could not sufficiently steady her hand. But Sir Henry had written before—he was coming now—so all was at once summer and sunshine in her heart.

She listened breathlessly for Mrs. Fortescue's reply, who only made some faint objections that her husband soon overruled.

Three days later she heard her father give orders that the carriage should go into

Lexborough to meet Sir Henry Harcourt, who was coming by the afternoon train. She could not stifle the gladness which filled her heart, neither could she express it, so she only did what seemed a very contradictory proceeding, she ran up into her room, and hiding her face in her hands cried heartily; for her tears were those of deep and genuine thanksgiving, and of hope which, from behind a cloud, was looking at her with the face of an angel.

Florence gazed at her in amazement when she came into the room with heavy eyes and pale cheeks. She did not at all connect Magdalen's state of mind with the advent of Sir Henry Harcourt. He had been so seldom mentioned of late that his existence had almost faded from Florence's memory. She saw that for some cause Magdalen was very much excited—that she was absent and dreamy; still every gesture

spoke of happiness, and there was a restlessness about her very unlike her usual quiet. She could not settle to any employment, but spent the day gathering flowers in the sun, till her head ached so much she was obliged to come in and lie down. As the day wore on, and her headache got better, the silence of the house oppressed her. Her room, too, grew hot with the afternoon sun, and she longed to feel the soft cool air blow upon her forehead. Florence had gone out early to ride with her father; so Magdalen took up a book as a companion for a solitary ramble, as well as the basket which she had only half filled in the morning, and went into the garden. The sun was still blazing, and Magdalen went down the garden steps, and turned off upon the lawn to a seat under a large elm-tree which she and Florence used to call their "summer parlour." The air was hot even in the shade.

She did not feel at all inclined to read, and threw the book and basket upon the ground at her feet.

"It will be cooler presently," she thought, "and then I will get the flowers. I cannot now."

She felt as if then she could only sit and gaze upon the lovely view before her, only watch the lights as they grew broader and stronger till the distant hills became more and more purple as the afternoon waned, and heavy clouds with golden sunlit edges gathered slowly in the horizon. The air was sultry, and Magdalen sat still and watched the sky as if in a dream.

"I wonder if those clouds mean a thunder-storm," she thought; "that would account for my headache. They are come in already," she said aloud, as a footstep on the gravel-walk above caught her ear. She looked round, and moved from under the

branches of the tree. On the steps that led from the garden she saw the figure of a gentleman shading his eyes with his hand, and looking round eagerly, as if in search of some one. He had evidently caught sight of her as she moved, and in a moment was by her side. He did not speak as he took her hand, and looked anxiously into her face.

"I did not know you had arrived, Sir Henry," she said, in a voice which, in spite of all her efforts to appear indifferent, betrayed her agitation.

"I am only just come, and found the house entirely deserted. I was looking round the garden in the hope of seeing some one, when I fortunately caught a glimpse of you."

"Papa and Florence are riding; but I think mamma is at home," said Magdalen, rising to go into the house.

"Yes, she is in her room. I asked the servant. How is she?"

"Not very well. She has felt grand-mamma's death so much."

"I feared that might be the case, and was, therefore, afraid of proposing myself sooner. How long it seems since I was here—since I saw you!" he said, looking into Magdalen's face with a very unmistakable expression of tenderness.

Magdalen blushed, but tried to speak lightly.

"It is long since Christmas—very long."

"It has appeared very long to me," he replied emphatically. "Did you think that I had given up my intention of coming? Perhaps it is too presumptuous to imagine that any thought of me should ever have crossed your mind."

Magdalen looked up into his face. As she did so, she was struck with its changed

expression. It was the same noble head, the same pale, chiselled features, but there was life and hope in his eyes, and the sad look she knew so well in them seemed to have vanished.

"I thought you would come some time," she said quietly—"that is, until lately."

"And then?"

"Then I thought perhaps you had forgotten—or changed your mind."

"Did not you tell me that I might come?" he asked.

"Yes; but you did not."

"I could not for several weeks; then I wrote to your father, but received no answer."

"Papa and mamma were away. I did not know you had written till yesterday, when I heard papa say so."

"I see," he said, looking rather mortified; "and now I am come, you mean to

punish me by not looking glad to see me."

"No, I don't—I am glad to see you; but I have had a headache all day, and you startled me."

"How inconsiderate and selfish I am, then, to talk so much about myself! But I am so happy to be here that I cannot help it. You need not go in yet, surely? Cannot I cut any flowers you want? I suppose that is the meaning of this basket? Here is a perfect rose," he said, walking to a rose-tree that stood near, and cutting off a white rose. "Will you put this in your hair this evening?"

"If you like," said Magdalen, holding out her hand.

"But a white rose is not enough by itself. I ought to get you some fern to put with it. I rather pique myself upon being able to arrange flowers."

"For ladies' hair?" she asked, with a mo-

mentary feeling of displeasure that he should ever before have felt any interest in the arrangement of anyone's hair.

"I have done it in days of 'auld lang syne;' but I daresay I should make a failure of it now. I am very fond of flowers."

"Then you had better get some for yourself before we go in. I can only wear this rose, so don't get any more for me, unless you want an excuse for gathering them," she said, smiling.

"Certainly not.. I shall wear no flower unless you give me one."

Sir Henry's bright manner had its effect in taking away any feeling of nervousness from Magdalen; and his presence, as usual, soon infused a sense of repose into her mind. She was not so conscious of her present happiness as of how barren her life had been without him—how she had hungered and thirsted for the sound of his voice, and

the sight of that pale, proud face. How had she existed all these weary months?

"Well, may not I even have a flower? You are very unforgiving."

"I have nothing to forgive now, but perhaps I may have, for you seem determined to find fault," she said saucily; "and there is no use in giving you a rose—a rose is not at all a proper nosegay for a gentleman. This is what it should be," and as she slowly ascended the steps into the garden, she stooped down to gather some red geranium and white jessamine as she passed.

"Stay a minute, and I will tie it up for you. After all, it is of no use," she said, as she gave it to him; "for you want a pin to fasten it with."

"You have given me that already. Do you remember this?" and he took a small gold pin from his handkerchief and showed it to her.

"Oh! my little gold pin. I have lost it so long. I could not imagine what had become of it."

"You should have asked me. I have worn it ever since Christmas. You gave it to me to pin a piece of holly into my coat."

"I am sure I never gave it—only lent it. I consider that a theft."

"Shall I give it back to you?"

"Certainly, after this evening—you want it now," she said, gaily, as they entered the house.

Magdalen looked eagerly round to see if she could find her father or Florence. She did not wish to leave Sir Henry, or to go back to her room; but the house was still empty, and she did not even hear the sound of horses' feet. Very reluctantly she took up her book and basket, which Sir Henry had carried in for her, and said she must go upstairs.

"Why?" he asked, evidently wishing to detain her.

"Because I must—pray let me pass," she said, as he held the handle of the door in his hand, unwilling to open it. "I hope you have brought some music with you."

"Will you stay if I sing to you?"

Magdalen shook her head and ran upstairs, leaving Sir Henry looking wistfully after her. She went into her room and sat down by the window, with a feeling of happiness that almost startled her. It was so unlike the dreary patience she had inured herself to practise—so unlike the morbid depression that had grown up in her mind from thinking herself unloved.

Magdalen was dressed for dinner before her sister came in.

"Dressed, Magdalen? Oh! how dreadfully late I must be! We had to wait hours for a tiresome man about those farm-build-

ings. I am so tired. Sir Henry Harcourt is come, I find. And do you know I must go again to this place—there is such lovely sketching there. We must go together.”

Florence talked on while she was taking off her things, without once looking up at her sister.

“Shall I help you to dress, Florence—it is very late?”

“Yes, do. You have lost your headache, then, Magdalen, have not you? What a lovely white rose that is in your hair! Have you got one for me too?”

“I did not get this,” said Magdalen, quietly. “I did not know you would care for one.”

“Who did, then?” asked Florence, carelessly, only thinking of how she could get dressed in time. “Papa was so vexed to be kept out so long. He said Sir Henry Harcourt would think it uncivil. When did he come?”

"Some time ago. I was in the garden, and he came there. He gave me this rose to put in my hair."

"Then you have seen him!" exclaimed Florence, pausing in the middle of dressing to look at her sister. All at once she understood the state of things—Magdalen's weary looks—why she had never mentioned Sir Henry Harcourt's name.

"O—h!" she said, drawing a long breath. "Maggie, you never told me—I think it was very unkind."

"How could I?" said Magdalen, blushing. "I never had anything to tell."

"You must have had," said Florence, in a tone of vexation—"you have something to tell me now—I should have told you anything."

"So should I, if I had anything to tell. Don't make me feel unhappy to-day, Florence," said Magdalen, with tears in her eyes.

"But Sir Henry Harcourt must have said or done something now?" persisted Florence.

"When he went away at Christmas, he said something about coming again, then he did not come; so what was the use of saying anything about it?"

"I see; and now that he is come, it has made you very happy," said Florence, putting her arm round her sister's waist, and kissing her affectionately.

"Yes, very," answered Magdalen, quietly.

Florence went down to dinner looking so much more nervous and excited than Magdalen, that Mrs. Fortescue believed all her imaginings about Philip Vivian to have been unfounded, and that in reality all Florence's interest was centred in Sir Henry Harcourt.

CHAPTER XIV.

“Then, in that time and place I spoke to her,
 Requiring, though I knew it was my own,
 Yet for the pleasure that I took to hear,
 Requiring at her hand the greatest gift—
 A woman’s heart, the heart of her I loved.”

“And who so joyes, such kind of love to hold,
 In prison joyes, fettered with chaynes of gold.”

1525.

“MY dear Horace,” said Mrs. Fortescue
 to her husband the same night,
 “did it not strike you that Florence’s man-
 ner was very odd and nervous when she
 met Sir Henry Harcourt? I do believe she
 has been thinking of him all this time, and
 not at all of Mr. Vivian, as I fancied.”

“I hope not, for I don’t believe Harcourt
 has been thinking at all of her.”

"Surely you saw how shy and unlike herself she was, and how she blushed whenever he spoke to her?"

"She was over-tired with that long ride, for one thing. I must not take her with me again, if there is any chance of my being detained as I was to-day. No, I don't believe Harcourt's thoughts ever travelled in that direction. If he admires either, it is Magdalen."

"Scarcely likely, when Florence is by."

"I don't at all agree with you," he replied, earnestly. "Magdalen is very gentle and retiring, but she is quite as pretty as Florence—more regularly so, perhaps—and she has a great deal of thought and good sense."

"Had we not better ask the Vivians to come over? It will be so dull for this man to be here all alone."

"If you like, but I doubt his finding it dull," said Colonel Fortescue, smiling.

Mrs. Fortescue was quite right in thinking that Florence's manner was altered. The idea of Sir Henry Harcourt being attached to Magdalen had taken her sister quite by surprise. She did not know if she were glad or sorry—whether she was most inclined to laugh or to cry. At night, when she insisted upon sitting up to talk, Magdalen was still unsatisfactory, for she persisted in declaring that Sir Henry Harcourt had never said anything to her, except that he was coming again, which, till now, he had not done.

The next morning was oppressively hot, and no one seemed inclined to go out. Florence asked Sir Henry Harcourt to fetch some music he had spoken of the evening before, and the trio adjourned to the drawing-room to try it. After a time, Florence

was called away, and Magdalen and Sir Henry found themselves alone.

"Shall I try and play this song for you, till Florence comes back?" asked Magdalen, nervously.

"No, thank you. I don't want to sing—I want to talk to you."

Magdalen rose from the piano, and sat down on a low ottoman near the fireplace. Sir Henry leant against the chimney-piece, resting his head on his hand as he looked down upon her. The venetian blinds were drawn to exclude the mid-day sun; but straggling rays fell with a flickering, chequered light upon Magdalen's head, as she sat with her hands clasped, bending forward in an attitude of attention. Sir Henry thought he had never seen a more lovely picture.

"Do you know that something you said yesterday has given me considerable pain?"

"That I said?" repeated Magdalen looking half frightened. "What could it be?"

"You said that you had expected me for some time; but that now you had given me up. I did not altogether deserve such mistrust, and as to changing my mind, you should have known it was impossible."

"How could I know anything about it? You asked me if you should come again, and then——"

"I did not come because I could not. Another time you will trust me?"

"Are you going away again?" she asked rather coldly.

"That rests with you—not if you will let me stay. You must know that every thought I have, every feeling of my heart, is centred in you. You must know that I love you deeply, passionately, beyond all earthly things. Magdalen, can you return my love?—will you entrust your happiness to my

keeping?—need there even be a question of parting between us?”

Magdalen was silent; but her fast dropping tears shewed how deeply she was moved.

“You do not answer me,” he said, and his voice trembled with agitation. “I often think that I have been wrong in cherishing a hope that one so young and lovely as you are would link her fate with mine. Magdalen, my life in some respects has been a sad one—of late a very lonely one. I am many years older than you are; but, God knows, your happiness would be my single object in life. Dare I hope that you will return my love?—that you will entrust your bright youth to such a one as I am? Sometimes I have felt as if it was wrong—wrong and selfish to ask you; but a friend, a very dear old friend, gave me heart and courage to try—tell me, Magdalen, may I have hope?”

Magdalen looked up into his face. He was very pale, and his eyes full of tears. She held out her hand silently.

"Then you are not afraid," he said earnestly, clasping her hand between his. "Oh! Magdalen, be very, very sure. If you have any doubt, say so now. I would rather die—rather never see your dear face again, than that word or act of mine should bring sorrow near you."

"I am afraid of nothing," replied Magdalen in a low voice, "except that I am not worthy of you—that you will not find in me what you require."

"My darling!" he said, drawing her towards him, and kissing her brow. "How is it possible, when the very sound of your voice fills my heart with unspeakable joy! Your presence alone is enough for my happiness. God grant that I may make yours!"

Magdalen felt, as she rested her head on

his shoulder, as if she had obtained happiness, protection, and entire repose in the shelter of that great love.

"I have no fear of not being happy with you," she murmured.

"My life has been a sad one as yet, dearest, full of varied and bitter experiences. You are to be my good angel."

"There must be no more sadness now, then," said Magdalen, trying to speak cheerfully. "Remember that you have given me the task of making your life bright. It must be all sunshine now."

"It will be for me when you are by," he said. "This will make my dear old friend so happy."

"Who is he?" asked Magdalen.

"I should like to tell you all about him, and make you love him at once." He then proceeded to give her a graphic description of Dr. Croly and her future home, till the

striking of a clock recalled Magdalen to a sense of how much time had elapsed since Florence left them.

"One o'clock!" she exclaimed. "Why did not Florence come back, and I have been here all this time? What shall I do?"

"Stay, of course, till she does come. I, for one, am very grateful to her for staying away."

But Magdalen had taken a panic that she had been transgressing the rules of propriety in a very unprecedented manner, and would not be persuaded to remain. She was mistaken in thinking that Florence had not returned; she had done so very soon; but the fact was that, when she opened the door and saw her sister and Sir Henry in such earnest conversation, she retreated as quietly as possible, and went upstairs, to wonder and to long for Magdalen's return.

She grew very tired of wondering and

waiting, and was thinking of going to find her sister, when the door opened and Magdalen entered.

"Well!" said Florence, breathlessly, "tell me, is it so? Oh! I see it by your face, you look so happy. I can't be glad, Maggie. What shall I do without you?" and Florence behaved in a most unusual manner, and burst into tears.

Magdalen put her arms round her sister's neck.

"Pray don't," she said in great distress.

"I am not sorry, really—only very glad for you. It is so selfish and wrong to care for myself. What does papa say?"

"Papa! I don't know. Oh! I hope he won't speak to me about it."

"Not speak to you?" said Florence, half laughing through her tears at her sister's dismay. "How do you expect anything to be settled, then?"

“There’s nothing to be settled now—not in that way, I mean. If I ever go away it won’t be for very long.”

Florence assured her she would find that quite a delusion; and the conversation was soon interrupted by a summons for Magdalen to go the library. There, in spite of her sensitiveness and shrinking from the subject, she was obliged to go through the ordeal of receiving her father’s hearty congratulations. He had known Sir Henry Harcourt for many years, and was delighted at the prospect of so good a marriage for his daughter. All the circumstances connected with his possession of Combe Abbey had been related by Sir Henry Harcourt to Colonel Fortescue, who, however, professed not to see in them any objection to the proposed marriage; as in the remote probability of his losing the inheritance gained by his cousin’s death, he would still be in a position to make a com-

fortable home for his daughter. Mrs. Fortescue's manner was warmed into sympathy and affection by the occasion, so that Magdalen felt very happy, both in the present and in anticipations for the future.

The summer days sped on full of hope and life to the party at Waverton. The shade of sadness that used to rest upon Sir Henry's countenance seemed entirely dispelled, and he was the brightest of them all.

"When am I to show you Combe, Magdalen?" he said to her one summer's evening, when the lovers had sauntered away by themselves to the seat where Sir Henry had found Magdalen on the day of his return. "I wonder if you will admire it. The scenery is so very different from this."

"Of course I shall; but it will take a long time to make me love it as well."

"The sooner you begin, then, the better. I hear continually from Dr. Croly, urging

expedition, and longing to see you. Shall I tell him he may count upon us in September?"

"And this is July!" said Magdalen, in dismay. "What would Florence do?—Oh! quite impossible!"

"What shall I do? is the question, I think, Magdalen."

"It seems so impossible to leave home," she said sadly.

"But only to go to another home—a home that you have promised to make bright by your presence. Don't let us have delays, Magdalen," he said, rather gravely—"I am afraid of them—something always comes between me and happiness."

"I wonder what!—I wish you would tell me—I don't like to ask you exactly what I want to know."

"Do, darling, anything and everything."

"I wish you would tell me what it is that

makes you so afraid of delay—I want to know what sorrow it is that has made such impression on your life. You have told me many things, but you have not told me that. But not if it is painful,” she added hastily, as Sir Henry’s face clouded over at her words.

“Have you any mistrust of me, Magdalen?” he asked moodily.

“No!—oh! no, dear Henry; I am so sorry I said anything to annoy you. I really did not ask from curiosity,” said Magdalen, laying her hand on his arm, and looking up anxiously into his face.

“Why, then?” he asked quickly.

“Only because I like to feel one with you in everything. Do forget that I ever asked an indiscreet question—it is not my wont, I assure you.”

“I am only sorry that you are so imaginative, Magdalen, for I have nothing to tell.”


Magdalen was silent. His reply jarred on her, as wanting in sincerity, and she was not convinced. But she said no more, and never referred to the subject again.

It was the first faint shadow that had arisen between them, and Magdalen felt it painfully. She fancied that there was a cloud on her lover's face for some days, and that he was less bright than usual, though even more tender and considerate towards her. She believed that he was annoyed at her wishing for any delay in their marriage, and, the next time the subject was mooted, declared herself ready to abide by Mrs. Fortescue's decision, so that Sir Henry was still able to write to Dr. Croly and say that he might count upon seeing them in September. There was another person who was deeply interested in the report of Magdalen's engagement. This person was Mrs. Clements. She heard it accidentally one day in the

village, and was at once roused from the state of dreary apathy in which she lived, into one of great excitement. She hurried back to the farm, and interrogated Mr. and Mrs. Millard so eagerly on the subject, that, accustomed as they were to her want of interest in passing events, they looked at her in amazement. Mrs. Millard had always had a fear that she was slightly deranged. The farmer decided at once that she had been drinking.

"It isn't true, surely, what people say about Miss Magdalen and the gentleman up at the house?"

"Why, whatever can you have to say about it? He's a good-looking chap enough, with a power of money, as I hear, and a fine place in the south somewhere. A trifle old for our young lady, perhaps, elseways I don't see there can be anything to say about it at all."



"It is true, then?" said Mrs. Clements.

"True? yes, to be sure!" replied Mrs. Millard. "Why, all the folk are talking of it, and I see them riding and walking, and keeping company, which gentlefolks never do unless it's a marriage to be—do they, Matthew? The lady'smaid told me she thought Sir Henry was sweet upon Miss Magdalen at the time of the ball at Christmas. Not that I see them dancing together, though they might be, for all that, to be sure."

Mrs. Clements sat rocking herself in her chair in a kind of abstracted manner, which confirmed Mrs. Millard in her opinion that she was not altogether right. She sat with her eyes fixed on the ground, and her hands clasped, and occasionally raised, as something in her mind moved her deeply.

"You seem to take on a good deal about this," said Farmer Millard, eyeing her

curiously; "and I can't see how it concerns you. I think it best for folk to mind their own business," he muttered, as he turned away.

But Mrs. Clements heard nothing that was said to her. She was wrapt up in her own thoughts. The whole of that day her behaviour was so extraordinary that Mrs. Millard became quite disturbed, and began to consider if there was any way of getting rid of her lodger.

Mrs. Fortescue had fulfilled her intention of sending an invitation to Admiral Vivian and his nephew to spend a few days at Waverton to meet Sir Henry Harcourt; but before it was accepted she knew that she might have spared herself the trouble of finding amusement for him, for he was so completely devoted to Magdalen, even beyond what is usual on such occasions, that he did not seem to have a thought to bestow

on any other human being, or to be able to bear her out of his sight. This monopoly of her sister was a great trial to Florence, who had been used to her companionship at all times, and in every pursuit. Even Magdalen herself was sometimes half-conscious of a wish that Sir Henry would not claim her exclusive attention, and that he would be occasionally a little less *exigeant*. She was so unaccustomed to fetters, that even the silken ones forged by love sat uneasily upon her. Florence made no secret of her rebellious feelings on the subject, but Magdalen would not for the world have put her half-formed thoughts into words. She was so much in love with Sir Henry, so full of admiration for his noble, chivalrous nature, and respect for his intellectual powers, that his slightest wish was law to her.

Florence, who was not in love, was, on the contrary, frequently provoked with him,

and would pour out her grievances to Philip Vivian very fully. He was the only sympathetic listener she could ever obtain, for Isabella Vivian had left Broome Hall, and the Admiral, to whom she had first carried her troubles, with the entire conviction that she could enlist him on her side, only laughed at her, and declared that it was the right thing, and that, if it was her own case, she would be very much displeased to find it otherwise.

"I don't believe it," replied Florence, pettishly. "I certainly would be perfectly free before I was married, whatever befell me after. Sir Henry will have Maggie with him always—why does he grudge her to us now? She is to go away altogether in September," she added, as her eyes filled with tears.

"I sympathise with you entirely, Miss Fortescue," said Philip, who had come in while

she was speaking. "Depend upon it, in this life freedom is everything—freedom in thought, word, and action. Nothing makes up for the want of it."

"Pretty radical sentiments, Philip," returned the Admiral, looking rather grave.

"Now, my dear uncle, I should like to know if any man alive agrees with me more fully than you do?—or if any man alive bears coercion less well? The tyranny of affection is very much to be dreaded; it is the greatest tyranny of all."

"According to that I must also be a tyrant," said Florence discontentedly, "not to be able to spare Maggie, but to wish to keep her all to myself."

"Possibly, if her wish were strongly the other way. But in this case I don't believe it is. Harcourt is a very good fellow, but has lived too much alone of late years quite to understand the 'give and take' system

properly. Then I imagine he is sensitive, and living with a sensitive person generally militates against perfect freedom."

"But I really like him so very much," said Florence half penitently. "He is so good and so clever, that I suppose it is unreasonable to quarrel with him because he appreciates Maggie."

"Monopolise, you mean, which is a very different thing, and not a necessary consequence of appreciation. But no one would be so unjust as to accuse you of being reasonable," he added, with rather a mocking smile.

"Thank you," said Florence, in a tone of annoyance, "I quite understand what that means. I don't wish to be unreasonable. The fact is, I was foolish to say anything about it."

"Don't say so, pray don't," said Philip, his manner changing at once into one of

warm interest, as soon as he saw how much Florence's feelings were involved. "I do thoroughly understand what you mean, and wish that Isabella were still here. She might be some sort of substitute for your sister ; simply so far as to prevent your being alone."

"I don't mind that," said Florence sadly.

"If the right person is unattainable, perhaps it is best to be alone. But do not say again that you will not express what you feel," he said, with great earnestness. "I could not bear to think it. Won't you go out this afternoon ? Let me row you across the lake to Norton Woods."

"That would be pleasant, it is so hot," said Florence more cheerfully, appeased by his evident sympathy. "Perhaps Maggie will come with us ; I will go and see."

Florence had not entirely recovered from

her irritation, though Philip's manner had, in some measure, soothed her, and it was in rather an aggrieved tone that she asked her sister if she would come out.

Magdalen did not reply, but looked up into her lover's face to read his wishes.

"Mr. Vivian proposes to row us across the lake to Norton Woods. Will you allow Magdalen to go, Sir Henry?" said Florence, in a tone of mock humility. "There is pleasant shade under the trees."

"What do you like, Magdalen?" said Sir Henry, apparently not perceiving Florence's ironical manner.

"Should you like it, and will you come with us?" said Magdalen, raising her large soft eyes appealingly to his face.

"Of course I shall, if you go," he answered quickly.

Magdalen decided that she should like it;

328 COLONEL FORTESCUE'S DAUGHTER.

so Philip Vivian did row them across the lake, and the afternoon was spent under the trees in Norton Woods.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

